

ST. AGNES CHURCH



CLEVELAND

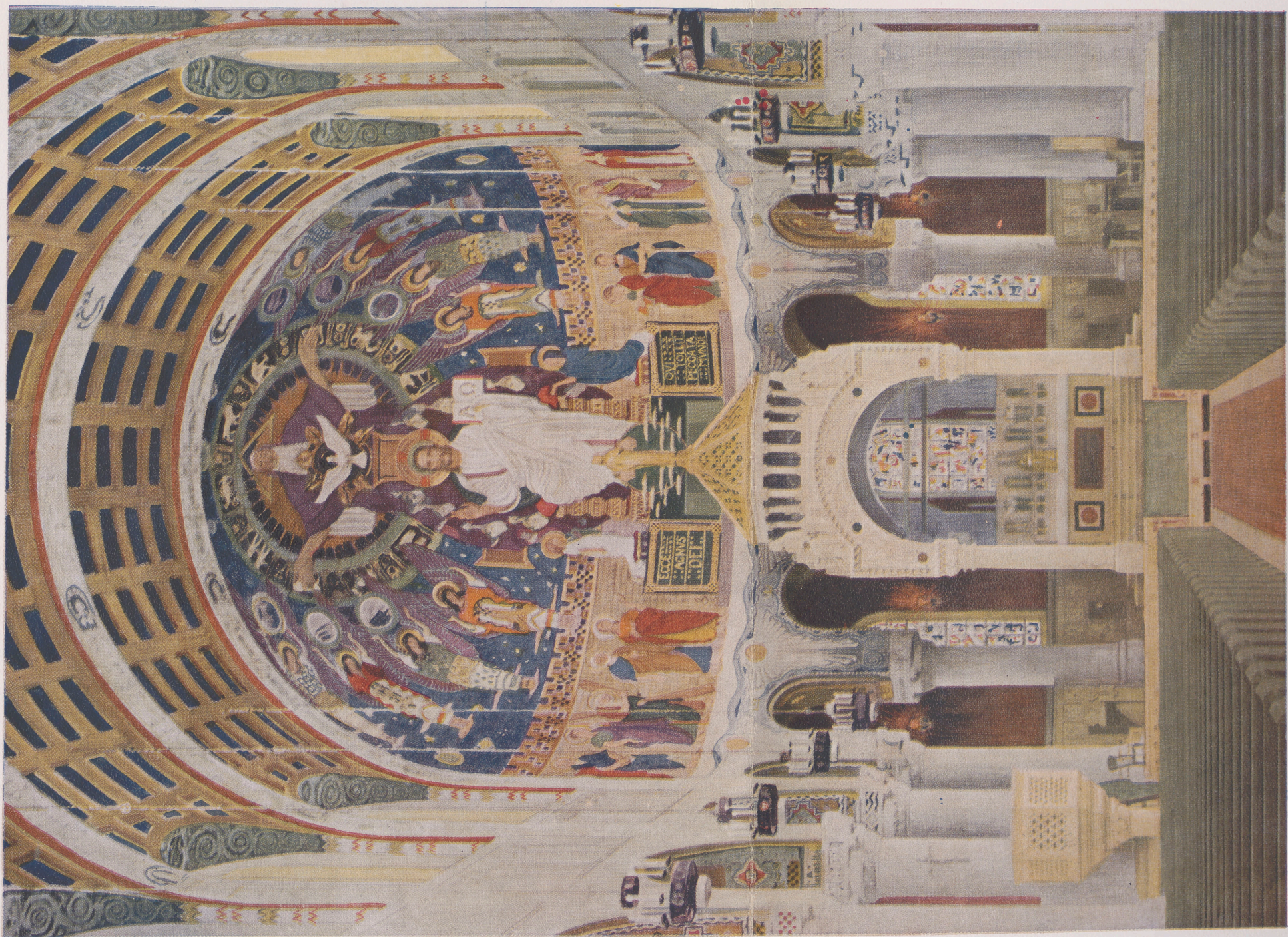
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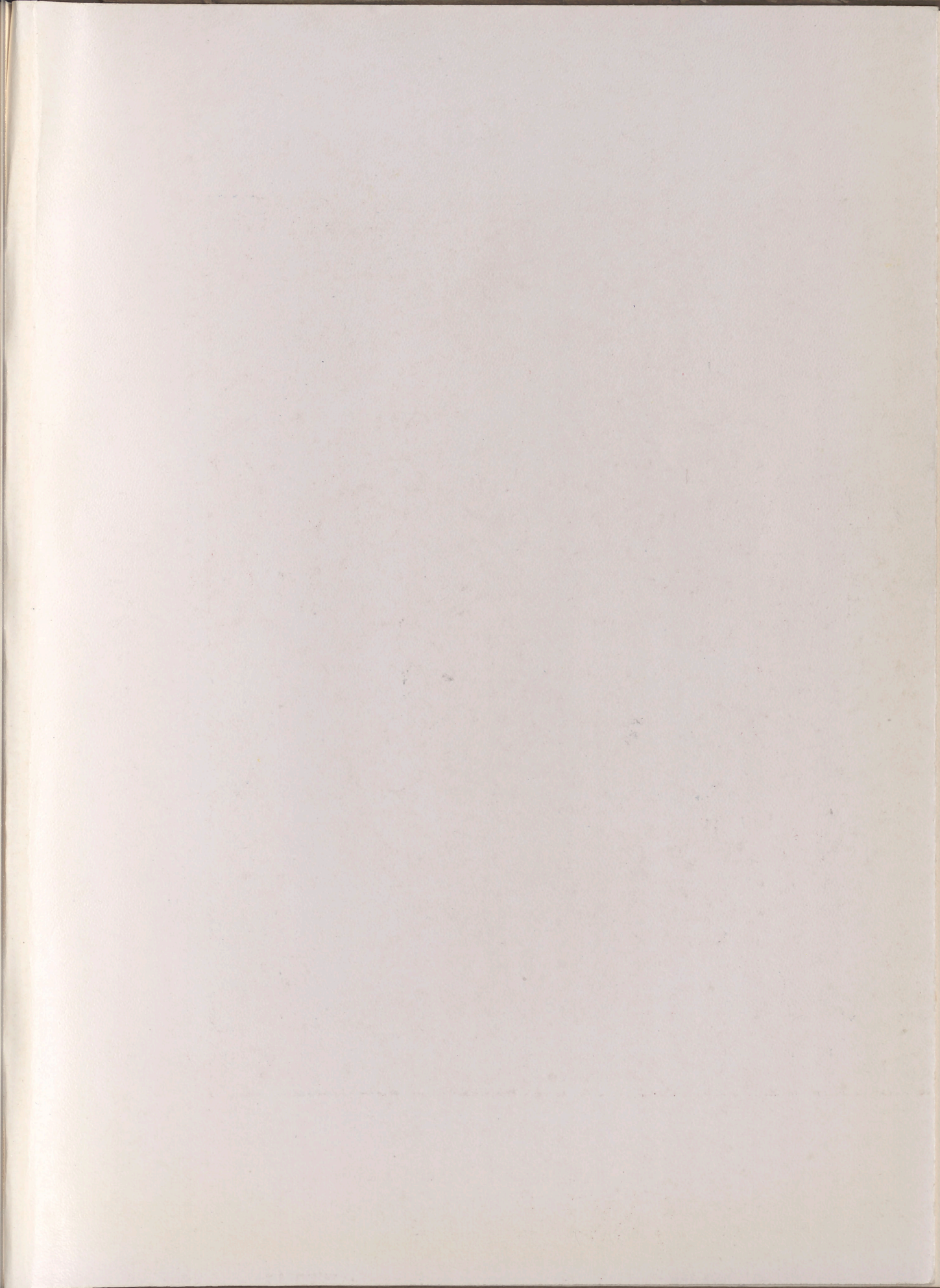
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ST. AGNES CHURCH

CLEVELAND - OHIO

AN INTERPRETATION
By ANNE O'HARE McCORMICK



The Reverend Gilbert P. Jennings, L. L. D.
Pastor

JOHN THEODORE COMES
Architect

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AN INTERPRETATION
BY ANNE O'HARE M. GORMICK



THE MARTIN PRINTING COMPANY
CLEVELAND, OHIO

The Reverend Gilbert F. Lechner, J. D.
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Architect

FOREWORD



THE most interesting study in the world is the history of man. All drama, all experience and all philosophy are contained in that long and unfinished Odyssey. But it is an epic so vaguely and feebly told in the written record that the wise man does not go to books to read history; he goes to buildings. To know man, what he thought, what he dreamed, what he worshipped, it is only necessary to see how he spent himself and for what uses he mined the earth and blasted its quarries. History is "a catalogue of the forgotten," more likely to be wrong than right. The chronicler in the midst of the event perpetuates merely his own prejudices or opinions, and after the event must rely upon the prejudices or opinions of others. Architecture is the true witness. No one can impugn that living testimony, or deny that walls are the most vivid and universally legible handwriting that one age indites to another. The past is best restored and reanimated not by its records, but by its ruins.

Architecture is self-revelation, a memoir of unfailing fascination for him who travels the world to read the illuminated chapters of the human manuscript. Man has always built to express himself and what he loves most. When he pours out wealth and energy and art to erect banks like Greek temples, office buildings like Gothic cathedrals, moving picture theatres like Roman palaces, private dwellings like royal courts, you know that his treasure is money, or business, or pleasure, or self. But when he sows a continent with churches, plants a cathedral in every hamlet, as he did in the Middle Ages, then you must conclude that in that time his chief interest was in religion, and that he was in love with God.

And if man builds what he loves, it is quite as obvious that he builds best when his love is highest. The centuries that built for God were the greatest building age in the history of mankind. The

work of the medieval builders has been the delight and despair of their successors ever since. They built in a passion of energy and devotion, spendthrift, robust, joyous, young. They counted no cost and expected no fame. They built for another world, and so out-reached all the standards of this. It may be too much to say that they were so eager to please Heaven, or the Queen of Heaven, that they were actually inspired by a taste impeccable above human tastes and a sense of beauty perfect above human sense. That is how the miracle of such an achievement as the Cathedral of Chartres is explained by the most skeptical of American scholars, Mr. Henry Adams, a son of the Puritans who makes claims for the power of the Mother of God that no Catholic would dare to make.

It is not too much to say, however, that the "first fine careless rapture" in art and architecture is to be recaptured only when modern builders are fired by the same faith and love that created the glories of the past. With all the new tools of science and of skill, heavenly structures are still not to be built for earthly ends. Taste still rises as high as the sources that feed it, and no higher. It is fortunate, perhaps, that few of the churches erected by this generation will live to tell tales upon us to the future. If they did, they would reveal us too candidly and too completely. When congregations realize that they build what they are into their churches, that the walls are as strong as their devotion and as beautiful as their aspiration, they will take more thought for the kind of confession of faith they are willing to make to their children.

The Church of Saint Agnes is a twentieth-century church on the main artery of a typical twentieth-century city. It is one of many churches rising out of the heart of Cleveland, but distinguished from the rest by a type and form that subtly set it apart. This distinction is not accidental or unintentional. It is partly the effect of an architecture that recalls the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but mainly the effect of the spirit of those ages of faith which their architecture invokes. In the first place it is emphatically Catholic. No passerby could mistake it for anything else. And no passerby, however casual, could escape the impression that it was conceived

in faith and builded in love. The soul of the builders already speaks from its walls as the soul of the old builders speaks across the centuries and cannot be silenced. On its busy corner in a swiftly changing city, it utters the same serene assurance that its truth will not change. Its voice is not mystical, like the Gothic, or secular, like the Renaissance. It is clear and simple, like the faith of the earlier age that inspired it.

The Church of Saint Agnes is interesting because, like its prototypes, it has something to say. What that is it is the purpose of these pages to suggest. They are worth writing and worth reading only because Saint Agnes' contributes something fresh and vital to the ecclesiastical art of America.

Whether you like it or whether you do not depends first upon your knowledge. A man may prefer Gothic architecture to Romanesque, or classic to Byzantine, but he cannot reasonably prefer any style unless he knows something of all styles. Whatever the architectural or decorative shortcomings of Saint Agnes Church—and no building is perfect—its most enthusiastic admirers are those whose knowledge gives them the best right to judge. Mr. Ralph Adams Cram, the best exponent of the Gothic in the United States, writes of it as "the most distinguished piece of work I have seen for a long time." It is constantly used as a model in the lectures of the Cleveland School of Art and the Art Museum. It has been celebrated in art journals and by visitors and sightseers from all parts of the country. It is generally recognized as a fine example of a great style, as a strikingly successful attempt to build a parish church of a moderate size and at a moderate cost not unworthy to compare with the best churches of all time.

This accomplishment was made possible because the pastor of Saint Agnes', the Rev. Gilbert P. Jennings, LL. D., himself a lover and student of good architecture, had the wisdom and vision to entrust the realization of his life-long dream to a competent and specially trained ecclesiastical architect. This architect, Mr. John T. Comes, of Pittsburgh, was permitted to design every detail, from the building itself to the candlesticks on the altar, and to finish the

church down to the last inch of decoration. Construction was begun in the year of great destruction, 1914. When the church was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. John P. Farrelly, Bishop of Cleveland, on June 18, 1916, after two and a half years spent on the plans and only a year and a half on the actual building, it was complete. There is no chance for any one else to mar the harmony which is its chief beauty.

The vision of the pastor and the spirit of the people were thus translated by the skill of the architect into the most lasting speech in the world. This speech is of itself so eloquent that it seems futile to try to render the clear poetry of arch and tower, color and carving, glass and fresco, in the dull measure of prose. It is attempted partly to help the friendly or curious passerby to read the illuminated script; but mostly to recall the meaning of the ancient and immortal phrases written into its walls to those dwellers within the gates who have forgotten the mother-tongue of the world.

I

THE FAMILY TREE



As you look at the Church of Saint Agnes from the other side of Euclid Avenue—unfortunately there is no stone-paved French *place* or gross-grown Italian *piazza* to give you better perspective—your first impulse is to look again. A church so different from any church in Cleveland cannot be passed with a casual glance. Your next is to wonder a little at the effect of what you see. Walls of smooth gray Bedford stone rise out of a broad sweep of steps, three deeply recessed doors open under round arches, a pillared arcade runs beneath a great rose window, a carven crucifix tops a turreted gable, and back of all, overshadowing gray walls and red-tiled roofs, a tall tower, strong and steadfast, stands like a sentinel.

It is a simple composition, as such things go, well-proportioned, admirably balanced, combining lightness with solidity, grace with strength. The walls are rooted firmly in the earth, but with an air of confidence in their reach toward heaven. Some ancient power seems built into the calm stone, some old, insistent voice seems to echo in the restrained design. The facade lifts itself above the street with a commanding gesture that bids you follow. The portals withdraw and beckon; the rose window promises something precious and beautiful within.

If you are curious, you may try to analyze this effect. You may wonder just why a church so "foreign," so different from the familiar local patterns, should fit so naturally into its corner on a busy Cleveland street. You may wonder how, being so new, it implies so much age, and by just what means it is made to look so distinguished and harmonious, so simply and yet so beautifully expressive of the high uses to which it is dedicated.

The architect will tell you that the reason lies in the choice of the noble and churchly style of architecture to which the building

conforms. He will explain that Saint Agnes' is Romanesque, and therefore a distillation of the art and aspiration of the most Catholic age in the history of the world. He will point out the distinguishing marks of the Romanesque style—the round arch, the basilican plan, the rose window, the covered porch or narthex, the square tower with its octagonal top, the sturdiness and seriousness of the whole.

"It was not the intention," he says, "to copy any particular church built during the ages of faith, when Europe covered itself with 'a white robe of churches.' The aim was to secure a plan that would meet squarely all modern and practical requirements, that would retain the flavor and spirit of the best Romanesque traditions and yet give to Cleveland a church of some distinction and originality, expressing the ancient and modern continuity of the Church, and also the power of her adaptability to the language of the day."

Though unlike any Romanesque church that was ever built, therefore, Saint Agnes' so embodies the authentic spirit of the heyday of art and of faith that in order to study its details with any intelligence it seems necessary to take a backward glance at Romanesque architecture in general.

The ancestry of art is a subject of the most alluring possibilities. To trace the family tree of any building is to retrace the long march of human history. And all art must have a family tree, if only to prove its legitimacy. "There is no such thing as a 'new' style," says Ralph Adam Cram, "and there never can be a 'new' art cut off from the succession of the past."

The Romanesque goes back to far beginnings. It is the very earliest form of Christian church building. It may be said to have begun with the adaptation of the formal Roman basilica, or court of law, to the uses of Christian worship when the new religion emerged from the catacombs and was befriended by Constantine. The oldest Roman churches, the original Saint Peter's, Santa Maria Maggiore, Saint John Lateran, San Clemente, Santa Agnese, were the types which for a thousand years inspired the builders of the West, especially in Northern Italy, Southern France, Southern



Church of Saint Agnes from the West.

Germany and Northern Spain. At first they were simple basilicas—an atrium, a three- or five-aisled nave, a semi-circular apse for the altar, a low pitched roof. But almost immediately the straight basilica threw out transepts and became a cross, merging the Roman forever in the Christian. In time it sprouted towers, reached up to point or arch or vault its roof, expanded its apse with chapels and ambulatories, bloomed with a thousand varied beauties in that epoch of fabulous energy that lasted from the eleventh to the fourteenth century and culminated in the Gothic.

The Romanesque was the child of the Roman and the mother of the Gothic. It reached its zenith in the Romance country, in those sun-swept Latin valleys that cradled modern culture. It was always a little more naive, or native, a little more child-like, a little happier and more serene, than the great heights to which it led. When you catch its spirit, you recognize it as the spirit of Christian youth, vigorous, fearless and simple, believing all things, hoping all things, trying all things. The Byzantine, the Romanesque of the East, is art more mysterious, more opulently imagined. The Gothic, the Romanesque grown up, is art more self-conscious, more intellectual. The Romanesque is more elemental, more easily understood, the art of an uplifted people, mighty and young, in the first joy of creation. Its sign is the round arch, serene and solid, as the sign of the Gothic is the pointed arch, restless and aspiring. Henry Adams, in one of his luminous phrases, sums up the difference between the round arch and the pointed as the difference "between the love of God—which is faith—and the logic of God—which is reason." Another author very happily calls Romanesque the Credo and Gothic the Gloria of architecture.

The Romanesque style can be so much more successfully adapted to restricted means and space than the Gothic or the domed Byzantine, which demand cathedral proportions and vast expenditure to be at their best, that it is strange that it is so rarely employed in this country. It is a style with few American interpreters, and those mostly feeble copyists and uninspired journeymen. Richardson, of Boston, the designer of Trinity Church, was a life-long student

of the Romanesque, but it may be doubted if even he ever did anything so happily expressive of its spirit as the architect of Saint Agnes'. This is not only because Mr. Comes is a true and faithful artist. It is also because the Romanesque cannot be well adapted to Protestant or secular uses. It is instinct with the medieval ardor. It is the voice of an age and a people robustly and unquestioningly Catholic, and only those who believe with them can really interpret it. If Catholics of today do not understand it, they have lost some capacity to read their own vernacular. They have somehow blunted that fine intelligence of the soul that we call faith.

The early Christians covered the tomb of Saint Agnes outside the walls of Rome with a Romanesque basilica. The middle centuries blossomed with the work of the Romanesque builders. And now, having glimpsed the long road it has traveled to come to us, let us look more closely at the church which was built in the same old fashion to honor Saint Agnes on the main thoroughfare of Cleveland in the year of Our Lord 1916.

II

FROM TOWER TO DOOR



FIRST, the tower. Perhaps no element of a church so kindles the imagination as its tower. The ancient symbolists liken church towers to preachers, "the bulwark and defense of the Church." Certainly the tower is itself a preacher. From whatever distance it is seen, it proclaims a House of God and tells its silent story of the aspirations and hopes of men. There is something very heartening to the spirit in the sight of church towers rising out of the huddled roofs and smoky fogs of cities. In their perpetual gesture of exaltation, they are the sign that the soul has still its high citadels, its stairways to the stars.

From the east, long before the church is visible, the tower of Saint Agnes' seems to spring out of the centre of Euclid Avenue. No view of it is clearer or more picturesque than this, whether it is painted white upon a blue sky by the morning sun, or etched darkly against an empurpled west by the softening sunset.

As you approach, the tower recedes to the back of the church. It is a detached belfry, unusual in this country, like the hardy and firmly rooted campanili that brood over the storied towns and haunted landscapes of Northern Italy, and gain immeasurably in strength and effectiveness by their detachment. It is broad-based, massive and sturdy, as befits its setting. Anything slender or spiral would be obviously out of place amid the horizontal lines of the Romanesque. Unlighted and unornamented for nearly half its height, it lightens toward the top, as medieval towers do, into arched and stone-mullioned openings. It ends so naturally with the turrets that accent the four corners of the square belfry that the red-tiled cap with the shining cross at its peak seems at first sight superfluous. Such octagonal tops were commonly fitted on square towers by the French and Lombard builders, however, and may have been the acorns from which grew the heaven-piercing height of the eight-sided

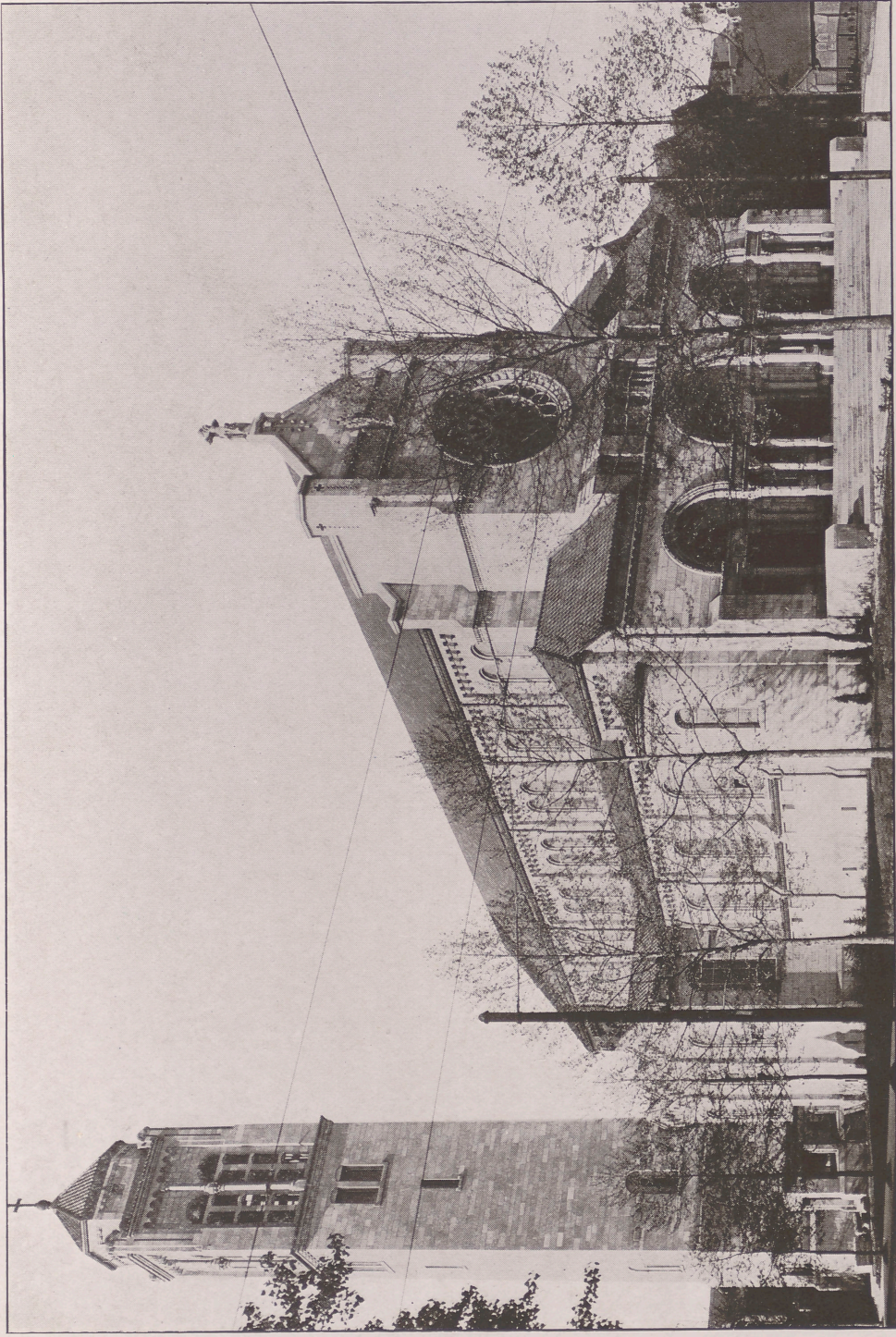
Gothic steeples. The old builders loved the octagon, anyway. It was the symbol of perfection, and they used it wherever they could.

To see a building fairly, you must look at it from all sides. If it is worth anything architecturally, it must satisfy the eye from whatever direction you approach it. Look at Saint Agnes' from the back, therefore, from the foot of Eighty-first Street, before you leave the tower for the facade. Notice the solid curve of the apse, with its tall arched windows, its circling ambulatory, the pleasing harmony of curved surfaces massed beside the uncompromising square bulk and height of the belfry.

Some great churches are all front, like the miraculous jewelled face of the Cathedral of Orvieto. Some show their greatest beauty in profile, like Notre Dame of Paris seen across the Seine. Others are at their best viewed from the rear. No one has ever known the full loveliness of the Cathedral of Florence who has not circled the chapels that cluster around the Dome, preferably in the moonlight, when the black and white marbles gleam like alabaster and ebony in a harmony of mass and line, light and shade, as moving and melodious as music.

To do them justice, however, modern architects are generally far more concerned about their exterior effects than the medieval builder, who often enclosed a richly decorated sanctuary with walls as rough and unfinished as a barn. Few of the original Romanesque churches could show the careful masonry of the walls of Saint Agnes'. The smoothly joined stones, the well-managed detail in cornice, coping and corbel, exhibit a refinement which sharply distinguishes the building from its early models. It has none of the crudities of its prototypes. Look at it from the side and it has the suggestion of one of those Italian jewel caskets preserved in old museums, an oblong box with a gabled lid, strongly made and lovingly adorned, but not so much embellished as to obscure the fact that its treasure is within, that it was fashioned as a safe and worthy receptacle for a hidden glory.

The facade brings that glory a little nearer. With its carved portals, its sculptured saints between graceful columns, its charming little arcade under the deeply imbedded and beautifully designed



Church of Saint Agnes from the East, Showing Tower.

rose window, it gathers unto itself most of the exterior decoration of the church and opens the way into the jewel box with a rich intimation of the splendor it conceals.

The rose window itself, like the halo of a saint, seems always a far projection of that splendor. The old builders vied with one another in the size and beauty of their rose windows, those flowers of medieval architecture which are as various in their traceries and sculptured petals as the roses of nature. They filled them with glass more colorful than the most brilliant roses that ever grew. Originally called wheel windows, reminders of the wheel on which Saint Catharine was martyred, as churches multiplied and roses flourished they came to be regarded as symbolic rather of the Rose of heaven, the Mystical Rose pre-figured by all the prophets.

The rose is Mary's emblem, and the rose window is one of the most beautiful inventions of the age of Christian chivalry, when the poetry inspired by devotion to the Mother of God flowered in knighthood and in "courteous love," in the songs of the troubadours, in Dante and Petrarch and Chaucer, in the astonishing reverences and refinements grafted upon a rude and warlike time by the influence of the Madonna. The rose window is a poem, too, as any one knows who feels its rhythm and its grace. The Gothic architects planted gorgeous roses in the walls of all their cathedrals, so that while the rose rightly belongs to the Romance or Romanesque age, no Gothic church seems finished without one.

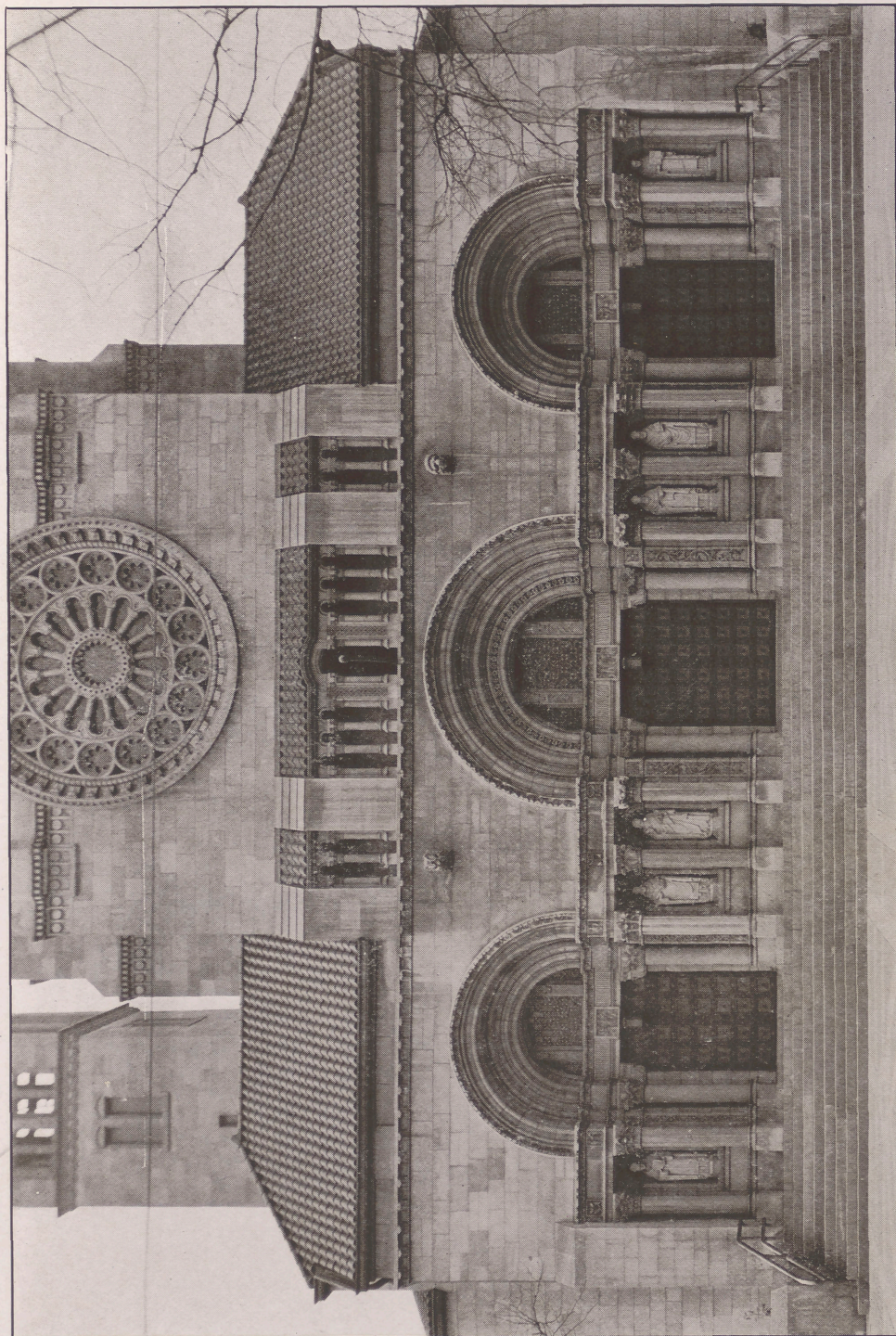
Saint Agnes' rose window is pure Romanesque in design. It greatly resembles, though on about half the scale, one of the most famous rose windows in the world, that in the west front of the Cathedral of Chartres, a twelfth-century masterpiece which the fantastic genius of Henry Adams offers as triumphant proof of "the Virgin's will—the taste and knowledge of 'celle qui la rose est des roses,' or, if you prefer the Latin of Adam de Saint-Victor, the hand of her who is 'super rosam rosida.'"

The rose of Saint Agnes' is twenty feet in diameter and is tied to the rest of the church by an ornamental band of stone work extending to the first buttress in the clerestory. Above it, midway

between the octagonal turrets which hold the vent shafts while adding originality and balance to the facade, is a figure of Saint Agnes, more decorative or structural than naturalistic in feeling, and over all, crowning the central gable, is an architectural group representing Christ on the Cross, Saint John and the Virgin Mary. To form a pedestal for this group, the gable ends in a square base carved with the symbolic snake, skull and crossbones to typify the triumph of Christ over sin and death.

If the rose is typical of Mary, the church door, as Durandus points out, is symbolic of Him Who said: I am the Door. It opens the Way to Eternal Life. The medieval builders, masters of a sacred symbolism which the world has half forgotten, crowded the arches of their doors with saints and angels, kings and princes, birds and beasts, implements of labor and signs of the liberal arts, as if to indicate to all who passed beneath how many and various are the ways and means of entering heaven. There are two very ancient churches standing amid the Roman ruins in the South of France, that of St. Trophime at Arles and another at St. Gilles, eleven miles away, which seem to have furnished models for the beautiful doors of Saint Agnes'. In the old churches the portals are much more elaborately carved, as might be expected in an age when every stone-mason was an artist and counted no time too long to spend on the embellishment of the House of God. But these modern doors have the same deep and shadowy recesses under Roman arches, the same classic columns with variegated capitals, the same sculptured frieze and carven saints in niches between the pillars.

A little forecourt of patterned brick and terraced steps of light stone form the approach to the arched doorways. The doors themselves are of bronze, wrought in a simple design of raised squares framed by decorated bands. A lantern hangs from the lintel of each and in the space above are small panels in bas-relief illustrating scenes in the life of Saint Agnes. Over the east door Agnes stands before a Roman tribunal refusing to marry the husband chosen for her. Over the central door is the scene of her martyrdom, and over the west door her triumph, when she bursts upon her parents and



Main Doors.

friends after her death, bearing her familiar emblems, the lamb and the palm of victory. Study these little panels, so crowded, so stiffly designed, so roughly and crudely drawn, and you get a miniature of all the architectural sculpture of the Middle Ages. These are exactly in the old spirit, naive, childlike, full of energy, and so made to fit the architecture that to substitute for them any of the smooth and polished and pictorial work of a modern sculptor would be completely to spoil the effect. They were modelled by Mr. Francis Aretz, of Pittsburgh, an artist whose sculptural work throughout the church shows a rare sympathy and skill in rendering the feeling of the Romanesque period.

Not much more of the old decorative sculpture is to be found on the portals. There are only the little squares of foliated and symbolical ornament set in the frieze over the capitals of the columns, the symbolic designs of the capitals themselves, and the long carved panels framing the doorways. These last are cut in the familiar grape and vine motive, type of the Eucharist or the Precious Blood, intertwined with the birds and beasts which the ancient carvers used to suggest the saints—the stag for Saint Hubert; or the virtues—the pelican for charity; the attributes of God—the raven for divine providence, or of the soul—the peacock for immortality. The repetition of the two-horned ram and the soaring eagle in the capitals of the columns is no doubt meant to typify the human and divine nature of Christ—the Christ of the Passion and the Christ of the Apocalypse.

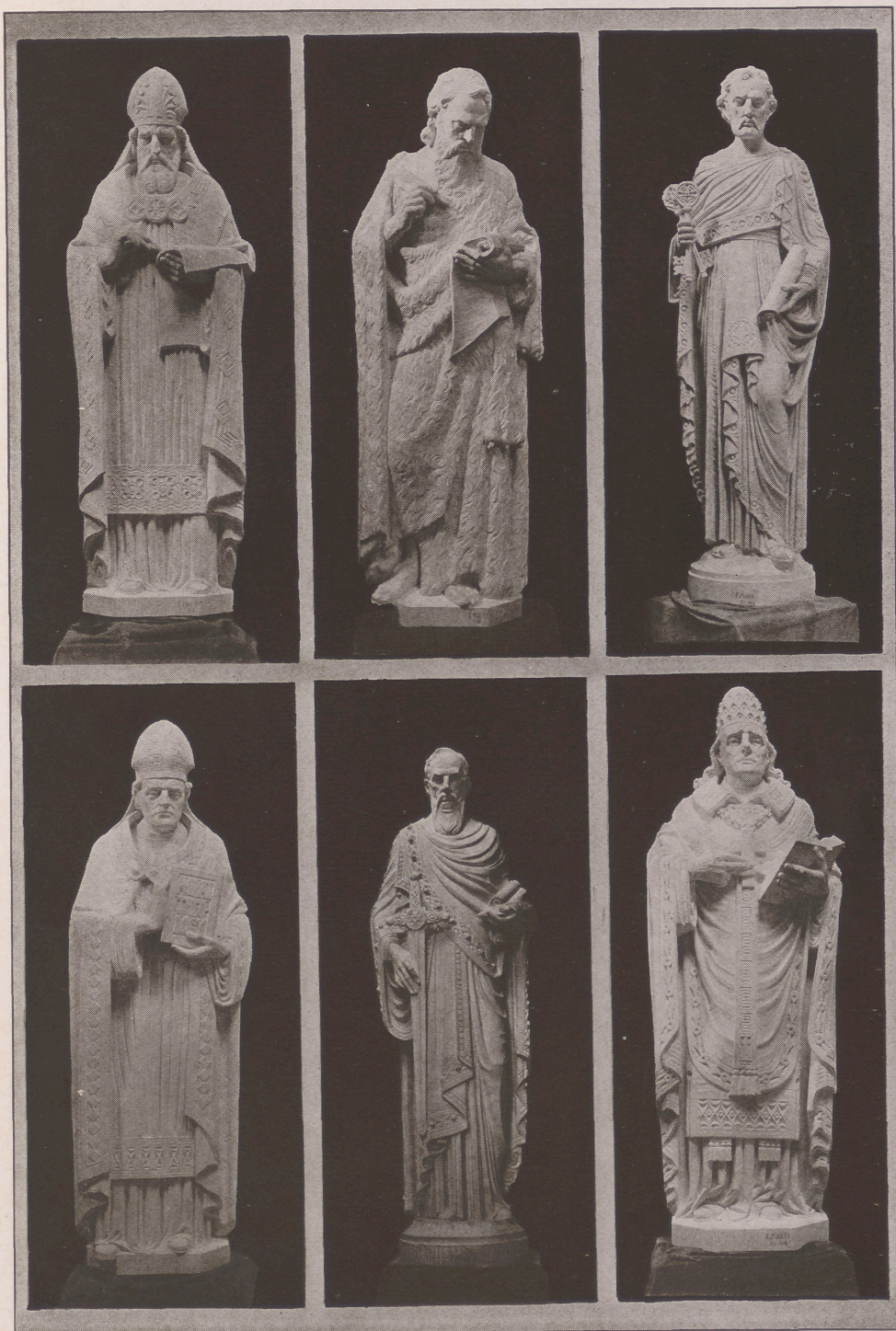
Just one suggestion is here of the playful humor characteristic of the Ages of Faith, a time so merry that church building was a joyous adventure punctuated by laughter and the frolicsome fun of youth. In the frieze beside the main door is a pensive little angel recording names in an open book, probably the names of the faithful and the punctual who pass beneath; and at the extreme right a little imp of Satan takes note of the late arrivals and those who seldom come to church. It may be that the sculptor introduced this bit of medieval humor into the dignified facade as a symbol of the pastor's frequent custom of enacting the role of Recording Angel at the Sunday Masses, when few of the tardy or the irregular are

able to escape his searching and zealous eye. Except for the corbels in the shape of griffin heads under the cornice, there are on Saint Agnes' walls none of the grotesques by which the medieval fancy delighted to depict the evil spirits flying from the House of God.

The six niches between the columns contain figures of Fathers and Doctors of the Church, silent exponents of its mission of teaching all nations. They are impressive figures, Saint Jerome and Saint Gregory, Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Alphonsus Liguori. They are formal and architectural in effect, true pillars of the Church indeed, but a little freer and more modern than the carving in the panels. It has been objected that the statues are somewhat too tall for their niches, but in that they share a characteristic of all Romanesque door sculpture. The saints and angels are always crowded. The exuberant imagination of that robustious age never had quite room enough to play in.

Saint Agnes', on the whole, is graver and more restrained than the buildings that inspired it. Though eight centuries younger, it seems older and more subdued. It would be impossible, perhaps, for a modern architect to make a literal translation of the Romanesque that would be intelligible in our sadder, more self-conscious and more controversial times. We like it better for that tincture of modernity, for mixing our present with its past.

And if, before entering its old-new doors upon the scene of the old-new Sacrifice, one could preserve in a single picture the most memorable moment of its haunted and reminiscent beauty, it would be the picture painted by the frost one snowy twilight last winter. For an hour, while the light faded, there was something crystalline and transparent about its softly glazed outlines, something unearthly in the frosted carvings and the shining shaft of the tower. Too clear for a dream, too radiant for reality, for a space it looked not like an old church or a new church, like Romanesque or Gothic or Byzantine, but like a temple transplanted from that celestial city whose walls are of chrysoprase and of jasper and whose gates are all of pearl.



Statues in Niches Between Doors.

III

ON THE THRESHOLD



THE moment you pass under the arched doors of Saint Agnes Church, you perceive that it is a basilica. It has every distinguishing mark of the earliest Christian church.

You saw from the outside that the vestibule is low-roofed, differing only from the old Roman narthex, or covered porch, in that it is enclosed. In the narthex, the first converts to Christianity were baptized, and in the narthex the catechumens waited, assisting at the sacred mysteries from afar, until they were received into the body of the faithful. In the narthex, therefore, was the baptismal font, just as it is here, in a niche at the left, behind a screen of carved wood and clear glass, to signify by its position that only those born again of water can enter the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven.

The baptistery glows with color, especially in the morning, when the sun paints an aureole around the figure of the Baptist in the east window and burnishes the Venetian mosaics set in the polished marbles of the wainscoting. The wall above is deeply blue, like the heart of the ocean, and marked with waving lines to suggest the flowing tides of regeneration, "the laver of water in the word of life." The symbolic figures on walls and vaulted ceiling are the same as those on the walls of the Roman catacombs—the dolphin, emblem of Christ, the fish, sign of the Christian, as being born again of water, and the hart, panting for the water brooks as the soul pants for the living God.

The font of Botticino marble is octagonal because the octagon, representing the figure eight, is one of the oldest symbols of regeneration. As the first Creation was complete in seven days, the number coming next has been regarded since the time of Saint Ambrose as significant of initiation into the supernatural order of grace. Nearly all ancient baptismal fonts are octagonal in shape, and many, like

this, have a bronze cover embellished with carved emblems of the Seven Sacraments and the Head of Christ, surmounted by a statue of John the Baptist.

Across the narthex, which is stone-walled and wooden-ceiled, with beams and corbels of a very ancient pattern, you look through another arch to a little office and a winding stair, which, as you may guess from the stained-glass figure of Saint Cecilia on the landing, leads to the choir gallery. The simple and well designed bronze lanterns that hang in the vestibule are the best lighting fixtures in the church.

And now, having been reminded that it is through Christ the Door, through the teaching of the Fathers and the Saints, through the saving grace of Baptism, that one enters the Christian church, having learned that there are literal sermons in stones and mystic meanings in every familiar form and phrase, we are ready to leave the place of the passerby and the waiting room of the catechumen, and to find out what all these preparations were made for and why so much care and thought and love and labor were lavished upon the outer walls.

The best time to see the interior of the Church of Saint Agnes is when it is the scene of some great ceremonial, the setting for the joy of some high festival. Stand at the end of the nave during the solemn mass on Christmas, or Easter, or the Feast of Saint Agnes, when the place is crowded with kneeling worshippers. Watch the choir boys singing their way down the aisle, the figures of priests and acolytes moving across the chancel and up the altar steps, the glowing color of lamps and vestments and windows under the bending Christ, the cloudy incense sifting through the gold meshes of the baldacchino, and you will get the thrill of the most stupendous drama ever enacted before human eyes. See the church as the background for this great drama, as painted and gilded and carved and jewelled for the incredible coming of the Son of God, and you will understand what churches are made for, and why, in the days when there were no unbelievers and the House of God had no rival in men's hearts, all the riches and color and splendor of the world were gathered up to prepare the scene for this daily miracle.



Narthex with Baptistry and Baptismal Font

The Middle Ages had a passion for color. They used it with that rapture for bright things which men feel when they are young and happy, poets and full of praise. Christianity has always been a religion of color. The color sense that died with the Greeks was born again in the mosaics of the earliest Christian builders. There has been no decoration since to equal such "jewel boxes of color and beaten gold" as were wrought before the tenth century in Rome, Ravenna, Venice and Monreale. The ritual of the Church is ablaze with color. The garments of the priests of the old law were made of "gold, and jacinth, and purple, and scarlet twice dyed," and the same symbolic and poetic employment of color has been preserved to clothe the celebrants of the new Sacrifice.

And the first impression you will get here is an impression of color. There is a base of strong gray, formed by the limestone of column and triforium and the harmonizing stain of oaken pews and woodwork. But the rest is color, in the windows of nave and clerestory, in marbles and mosaics, in walls and arches, in lamps and carved capitals. From the dull red of the tiled floor to the deep blue and gold of the coffered ceiling, the eye is beckoned and led by color until it rests upon the monumental figure of Christ Enthroned, painted with startling boldness upon the half dome above the altar against a background of stars and seraphim, saints and symbols, painted in pure, rich color, elemental and unafraid.

That overpowering apsidal decoration is fresco, not mosaic; it is Byzantine in effect, not in detail; but as you look at it from the door of the church, you feel that you are seeing the color of the Middle Ages as it must have been when it was new, before it was softened by the dust of centuries and saddened by age and decay. You have a sense of opening an illuminated missal, an "open volume of color," fresh from the scribe who dipped his brush in lost pigments with a lost skill. You perceive that all his crowding texts flow from and to that focal Figure. This House with all its glory is His, sings the chromatic chorus. And you remember that the Apocalyptic vision of heaven was a vision of color, of a Throne set in a rainbow, "in sight like unto an emerald."

You hear the Gregorian chant, you see that the priests wear the graceful, flowing vestments of the Gothic age instead of the stiff chasubles of more modern usage. You behold the seven ruby lamps around the sanctuary and watch the flicker of candles through the screen of the ambulatory as the acolytes file in to encircle the altar, like a living candelabrum, during the solemn moments of the Consecration. All elements combine to reproduce the atmosphere that fills old churches with the aroma of centuries of prayer and praise. Such atmospheres conquer doubt and denial. They comfort man with proof of the continuity of a hope expressed in changeless symbols. You cannot enter such a church, whether it is old or new, without a feeling of oneness with all the past, without a sense of participation in the only ceremonial and the only faith that are the same yesterday, today and forever.

IV

THE SANCTUARY



OUR first impression of Saint Agnes', that you are in a House of God, a House decorated with an opulence and beauty sanctified by the oldest and best traditions of Christian worship, is an impression created by very definite and carefully studied means. Let us see now, then, how the builders have contrived to achieve this effect.

In the first place, you perceive that the church is chiefly a nave and a transept. The word nave itself, from the Latin *navis*, comes from that symbolism of the Catacombs which conceived the Church as a ship "riding before the winds," the new Ark, the Bark of Peter. It represents the body of the faithful as the transepts represent the arms and the chancel the head, the whole built into the cross which distinguishes the Christian from the pagan basilica. Here is the Christian basilican plan at its simplest. The nave is practically enclosed by the massive monolithic columns of Indiana limestone. It extends without a break to the semi-circular apse. The two side aisles are merely passages, widening towards the front into shallow transepts which are hardly more than side chapels for the shrines of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, and leading into a deambulatory around the chancel.

The practical advantage of this plan is to secure the churchly effect of long rows of columns while keeping the altar in full view of every worshipper. It gives an unobstructed auditorium one hundred and seventy-five feet long, fifty feet wide and sixty-five feet high, with a seating capacity of about eleven hundred.

The artistic advantage is to gain an illusion of great spaciousness and dignity unusual in a Romanesque church, especially in a church comparatively small. The long sweep of the nave, exceptionally well lighted because of passage-like aisles and narrow transepts, is the most successful single feature of the building. The arches

are higher than in most churches of this type. There is more spring in the span of the barrelled vaulting. A triforium, or open arcade above the arches, is very happily suggested by groups of squat columns set in recessed panels under the clerestory windows. Without losing the serious solidity of the Romanesque, the general effect is of greater lightness, height and grace. The Gothic intention is always to carry the eye up. Here, you see, the intention is rather to lead your gaze straight to the altar, but with enough upward slant to take in the titan tapestry spread above it.

Thus the symbolic success of the plan is in announcing at once that the church is built for the apse, which is to say that it is built for the altar. No one looking up that pillared aisle could fail to grasp the purpose of the building or to take in at a glance the central facts of Catholic worship. The doctrine of the Trinity is shadowed forth in the three aisles, in the triforium, in the three divisions of nave, transept and apse. The redeeming Christ is the dominating figure in the great Byzantine half dome. Apostles, martyrs and saints look out from walls, windows and ceiling to testify to that communion of the friends of God which is the pledge of life everlasting. The altar railing, the barrier between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, opens its gates to steps climbing up to the canopied throne of that perpetual Presence for which lamps burn and jewels glow and gold and marbles and precious stones are built into beauty.

The nave is the church and the nave is Christ's. There is nothing to distract the mind from that great Figure or that great fact. Even the side aisles lead only to the altar. The short arms of the transept are but chapels, in which Our Blessed Lady and Saint Joseph hold subordinate and almost invisible court. One can get glimpses of both, of course, from the nave, charming glimpses against brilliant backgrounds of the red-robed Saint Joseph and the Boy Christ and of the blue-cloaked Virgin with her white Bambino. They are not shut out from the sanctuary, but from no place can they be seen first, and from the doors they cannot be seen at all. And aside from a Pieta and a Head of Christ in the side aisles, and figures



Nave Looking Towards the Altar.

of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the transepts, the church contains no other statues, unless you count as statues such architectural decorations as the columnar angels over the pillars, the Evangelists who expound the gospel from the four corners of the baldacchino, and the little gold image of Saint Agnes that stands above it as straight and slender as a pinnacle.

Very distinctive is this simple and single-minded insistence upon the fundamental truths of religion. The symbolism of the church is the symbolism of the Catacombs, its reiterant teaching that of the Age of Faith from which it derives—a simpler age than our own, untouched by many later devotions and concentrating upon the Mother of God and a few patron saints the intercessory fervor which the growing company of the Blessed has since somewhat diverted and divided.

From your post at the door you can see that the vault of the ceiling is coffered, or laid in squares, a treatment much more classic than Romanesque. This style was adopted as the best solution of the problem of securing perfect acoustics. The coffers are filled with acoustic felt and membrane, dyed blue and set between bands of gold. You will notice that the capitals of the columns vary in design. The carving is of so many schools—Byzantine, early Celtic, Norman, Italian—that if you could read even this small segment of the architecture you would skim a good many pages of human history.

If you observe the pews at all—they are admirably inconspicuous, as such necessary evils as pews should be—it will be only to note that they are low and gray, harmonious with the horizontal feeling of the Romanesque and blending with the delicate color of the stone. The lighting is by means of lamps hung from the ceiling. They are very simple in design, candles set in rounds of sheet iron with polychrome decoration, and would be as happily inconspicuous as the pews if they did not have to be lighted. The effect of the interior is much more beautiful when they are extinguished, and when, in the soft light of some late afternoon, you can go into the empty church and study its details at your leisure.

It is a very different place now, in the silence and the tempered luminance. Enter this time the door leading into the right aisle and you will get an Oriental view—a long, narrow arcade ending in one of the chancel windows hung like a Persian rug under a gilded arch. The Oriental effect is heightened by the pierced fret work in the doors of the confessionals, six in number, which are built into the walls of the aisles under the windows. They are of the same gray-tinted oak as the pews, but elaborately carved and designed with an originality and effectiveness which prove the art and skill that have gone into every detail of the church. Small ventilators filled with jewelled glass sparkle through the fret work, and over each door is carved a text glowing like the glass itself with the assurance of the Divine Mercy that softens the judgment seat.

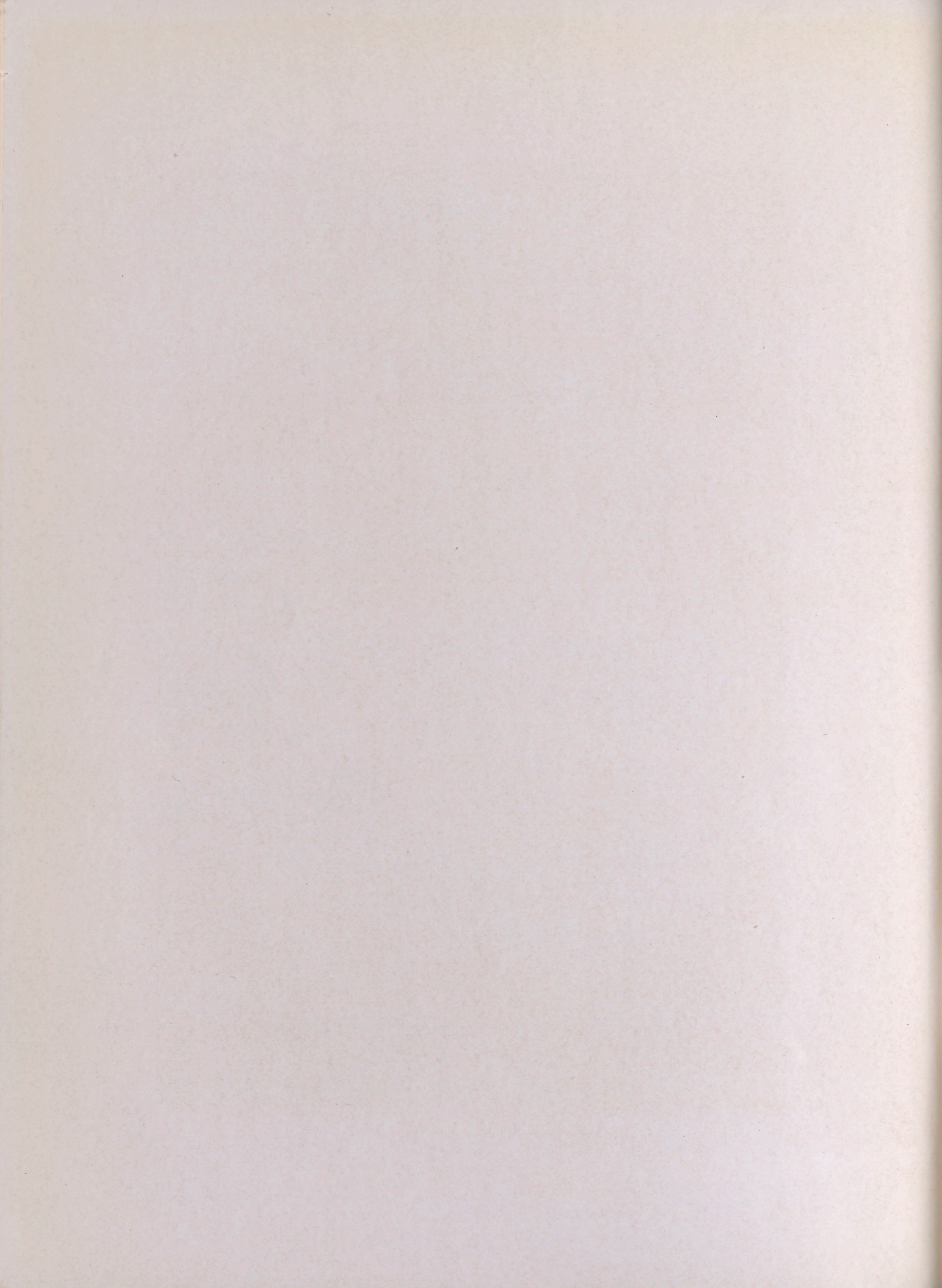
"I come not to call the just but sinners," says the first confessional on the west side. "Come to Me all ye that are heavily burdened," pleads the second. "God's mercy is above all His works," proclaims the third.

In a recess between the confessionals is a Pieta carved in wood, a striking and original piece of work by Mr. Henry Schmitt. Somewhat more realistic and modern than most of the decorative detail in the church, this group of Mary and the dead Christ with its expressive angels has just enough of the medieval seriousness and sincerity of feeling to justify its place here. It rests on a plain marble pedestal bearing the inscription: *Magna est velut mare contritio tuo* (Thy sorrow is deep as the sea).

The walls of the church are wainscoted up to the windows with slabs of olive Vermont marble finished with a border of colored marble laid in formal geometric design. In this wainscoting, framed in marble, are set the Stations of the Cross. These are flat painted panels, so clear and vivid in color that they are easily seen from all parts of the building, but not so large or so obtrusive that they are unduly prominent in the general decorative scheme. They are a copy made by an American artist of the Stations in the Church of Saint Anna in Munich, and were probably chosen because of a simplicity and vignette-like quality that tells the story of each



West Aisle, Looking into Ambulatory.





The Altar of St. Joseph.

Station at a glance. There are no more than four or five figures in any panel. They are painted in bright primary color on a background of brilliant blue, without perspective, somewhat in the manner of the Flemish and Italian primitives. The figures are plainly modern in feeling, however. There is nothing of the primitive conception in the white-robed Man of Sorrows Who stands out so strongly in each simple and uncrowded canvas that you can follow the Way of the Cross wherever you happen to be. Compare this idea of Christ with the Christ of the apse. Both are the work of modern painters and neither is quite in the modern or quite in the medieval spirit. Yet you will feel at once the difference between them as the difference between an early and a late decorative ideal.

In the west transept, facing the altar of Saint Joseph, you perceive how accurately it may be described as a small chapel, quite open, it is true, to the nave and chancel by means of the wide arches, but self-contained and intimate, focussing upon its own little half dome. There is here a happy proportion between the size of chapel and shrine impossible in churches with larger transepts. The side altars are rich in material but very simple in design. The marble tables are inlaid with gold mosaics and bands of vari-colored marbles, but their chief glory is the splendid apse-like decoration behind the niche.

Saint Joseph has a golden background rhythmic with bending angels holding in their hands the tools of the carpenter, a timely symbol of the honor heaven pays to honorable and consecrated toil. The Foster Father is represented as a benignant figure, middle-aged and grave, seated behind the Boy Christ, Who is depicted in those years when He helped the Carpenter and grew in grace and wisdom before God and man. Saint Joseph is clothed in a robe of dull Pompeiian red. At his feet is a frieze of conventional lilies rising out of cool green waters. The lily is the emblem of chastity, and is regarded as so typical of the chaste love of the gentle Guardian of Mary and the Divine Child that one of its varieties has come to be known as Saint Joseph's lily. The whole composition is very brilliant and beautiful. Before it swings an unusual lamp, made

of jewelled glass in the form of a cross, which seems to gather up the color of the decoration like a prism and hold it in its heart. When the church is dark these crosses glow in each transept like pendants of precious stones.

One architectural reason for the successful subordination of the side altars is that they are on a lower level than the main altar. This is apparent as you approach the chancel. Another reason is that the side aisle leads into an ambulatory, or aisle around the altar, which encloses the sanctuary and definitely separates it from the side chapels.

Stop and look at this ambulatory because it is one of the most beautiful and effective features of the whole church. You saw from the rear how it gave depth and dignity to the sanctuary. You see here how it floods it with color, filtered through mellow tapestries of glass, without interfering with the decoration of the apse itself. Most of the medieval churches had ambulatories. In the great Gothic cathedrals they led into a ring of chapels, sometimes five, sometimes seven, circling the sanctuary in a superb architectural harmony called a chevet. Often, as in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York, they open into a Lady Chapel behind the high altar.

But the original ambulatory was like this; it had no chapels. And it is difficult to remember one anywhere, on this scale, so satisfying, so well-proportioned and so lovely. The windows, which deserve to be classed with the best glass in America, help in this effect. So do the arches, which are much narrower here, you see, than in the body of the church, as if the Doctors and Bishops that columns are said to typify were crowding up around the tabernacle. In these narrow, or stilted, arches, Byzantine or even Moorish in character, are hung seven great lamps of finely wrought bronze which burn with a ruby flame, "shining forth with brightness in the darkness of this world" like the seven lights which Moses made, like the Seven Lamps of the Apocalypse, like the seven tongues of Pentecostal fire that signify the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. The design of these lamps is similar to but not so elaborate as that of the sanctuary lamp itself, a vessel of pierced silver and bronze fitly fashioned



Altar from West, with Entrance to Ambulatory.



View from Left of the Altar.



to hold the ever-burning flame which is the type of Christ Himself, the Light of the World.

Between the ambulatory and the sanctuary is a six-foot screen. This is of marble, panelled below and perforated above in beautiful symbolic designs; it repays study because it shows how carefully all the marbles in the church have been chosen and combined. Here in the sanctuary they are all imported, mostly from Italy, where a prodigal nature has filled even the mountains and the quarries with hidden veins of color—golden and black, blood-red and ivory, sea-green and opal. Examine these marbles, richly blent and lustrous, dug from old hillsides that gave altars to Apollo before the seamy earth knew Christ. They are almost as eloquent in their way as the religious symbols that crowd the chancel with such a wealth of imagery and allusion that it would require a volume to interpret them all.

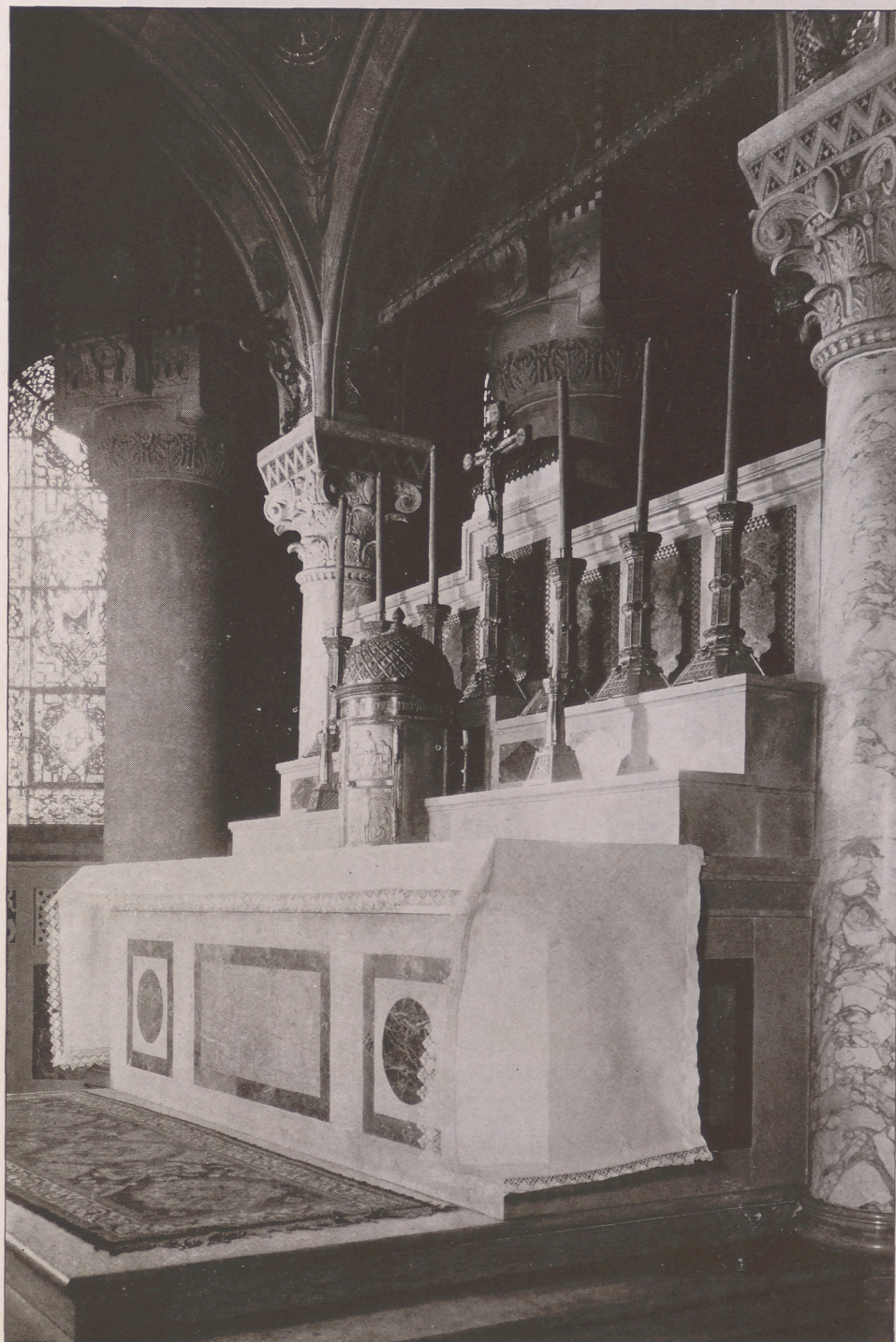
Take, for instance, the altar railing, which is carved out of Botticino marble in a very charming design. You will note that the capitals of the little columns are all different, as they were in those early churches and cloisters for which the builders gathered material wherever they could find it. Each has its own history if we could stop to read it. And the rail itself is meant to teach the separation of things celestial from things terrestrial. There are three wide gates to break this barrier, however, and on those gates, if you will look closely, you will see a pair of conventionalized peacocks and an entwining grape vine and ear of wheat. The vine and wheat, as you know, are symbols of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, and the peacock is the emblem of immortality. So perhaps these gates are meant to console us who stand on the earthly side of the rail with the assurance that heaven is open to those who feed their souls at this heavenly table. "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath life everlasting." Quite aside from their mystic message, these gates are a particularly fine example of cast bronze. The marble posts on which they swing are inlaid with mosaic forming another ancient symbol, a cross resting upon a circle, figure of the world redeemed and conquered by the cross.

Here at the middle gate is your best view of the sanctuary and altar. The floor is paved with tile in rich and variegated patterns,

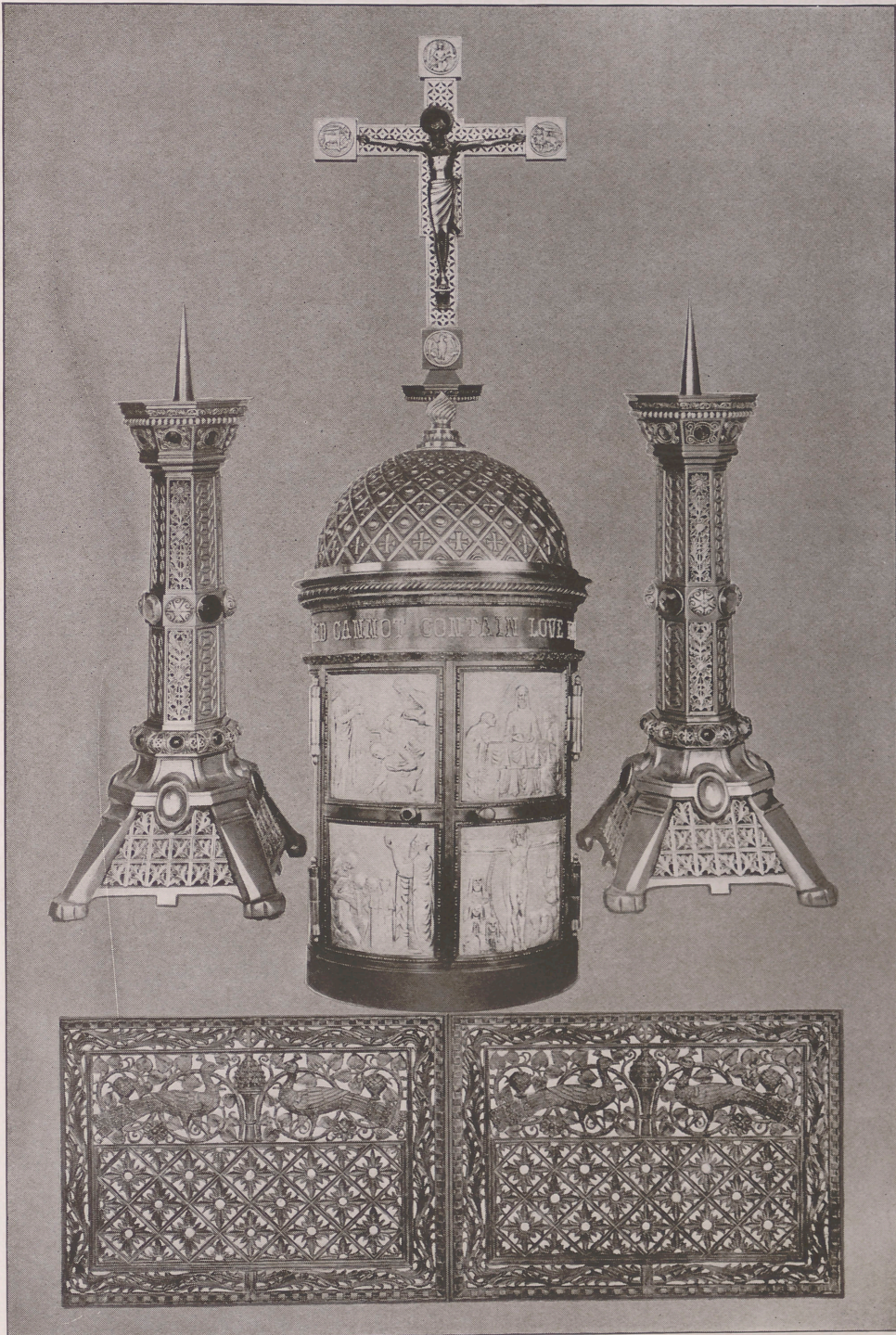
tessellated and banded with marble. The effect is much warmer and more interesting than if the parquetry were all of marble, and the uneven reds and browns and purples of the tiles make a pleasant foil for the gleaming surfaces of screen and altar, rail and polished column. Here the effort of builder and adorning centres and culminates. You have reached the place where the Glory dwelleth, the Glory heralded by the tower and the rose, by the deep portals and the flowing arches. There is no need of symbols or interpreter to tell you the message written here. It is announced by art, by color, by gold and precious stones, by all the evidences of the desire of man to offer gifts and create beauty for his Lord. There is no need for the painted text: "Behold the Lamb of God."

Believer or unbeliever, you know that that high canopy covers a throne. You see that this canopy, or baldacchino, repeats the architectural as well as the spiritual message of the entire building, but in enriched and embroidered and more accented syllables. Its serene Romanesque arches are gemmed with Venetian mosaics. For the massy-capitaled columns of the nave are substituted Byzantine shafts of delicately-veined and sparkling marble. Carved flowers and vines between the arches proclaim that the fruits of the earth are His and its fairness. The marble dome again breaks into the symbolic octagon, but an octagon that forms a little open pavilion supported by graceful columns and fretted and lined with gold. The Evangelists are seated at the four corners, each with his symbol and the book of his Gospel, the cornerstones of the teaching of the Church. Observe how these figures are made a part of the design and how like a shining spire is the gilded straightness of Saint Agnes at the apex of the whole. The more closely you study it, the more you will appreciate the skill and taste that have gone into the fashioning of this royal baldaquin erected for the honor of no earthly king.

Even greater restraint marks the design of the throne itself, which is as simple as an altar can be, a broad table upholding a rather low reredos of severely straight lines, but sumptuous in the texture and color of its marbles and the bright jewelry of its mosaics. It is a resting place for the tabernacle, and the tabernacle, like the tent of



Main Altar.



Tabernacle, Altar Candlesticks and Sanctuary Gates.



Details of Sanctuary Furniture.

the Old Law which it replaces, is of the ancient circular shape, wrought out of bronze dipped in gold. Its rounded doors are divided into four panels, sculptured in low relief with a delicacy and child-like charm recalling the work of the early goldsmiths. One of the upper panels portrays the Israelites gathering manna in the desert, and the other Christ supping with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, at the moment when they knew Him in the breaking of bread. Thus the old manna and the new, the Eucharist prefigured and accomplished. "Your fathers did eat manna and are dead, but he that eateth this Bread shall live forever." The lower panel offers the same contrast. In one Melchisedech offers the sacrifice as the High Priest of the Old Law; in the other Christ offers Himself on the cross, High Priest and Victim of the New Testament. Around the tabernacle the pastor has carved a bold and beautiful line in English expressing his interpretation of the Mystery locked behind this symbolically carved and golden door: "Whom the world cannot contain love imprisons here."

That is the meaning of the church and its ornaments, the sum of all it has to say. For the altar is Christ in truth as well as in figure. All the rest prepared the way for this revelation of His presence. The mason built His symbol into the door. The goldsmith imagined Him in the lamp. The sculptor carved His monogram in stone and marble. The painter saw Him presiding over the planets and ordering the courses of the stars. The glazier discerned in Him the True Sun that enlighteneth the world and wrote His scripture in a "sea of glass." The builder signed his work with the sign of the cross. Everything points to Him and proclaims that He is here. The only place to learn to understand church architecture is at the foot of the altar, in contemplation of that miracle of imprisoned love. Kneel on the altar steps, reminder of that ladder of Jacob's vision that led up to heaven, and you will see all arts as the handmaids of the Lord and all symbols as the endless repetitions of man's struggle to express God, the spiritual esperanto of the aspiring ages.

The strange conventionalized angels soaring above and around this altar are probably very unlike the angels that Jacob saw. And

soaring may be too free a word for figures so straight and pillar-like; architectural sculpture could not go much farther than these angels. But they suggest the seraphim more vividly than if they were realistic and human; more than that, their vertical lines elongate the columns and carry the eye up without a break to the fresco above. This is not, however, the place to study that symbolic panorama. Look no higher now than the angels and note that each of the ten carries a shield carved with one of the instruments of the Passion, the nails, scourge, column, crown of thorns, ladder, sponge, sword, et cetera, reminding us over and over again that this is the place of Sacrifice.

Other symbols are chiselled upon the tall crucifix and the six great candlesticks that stand in a row upon the altar. These are of bronze inlaid with silver and semi-precious stones and, like everything else in the church, are of special design to harmonize with the architecture. No other decoration detracts from the dignity and richness of the sanctuary. Flowers are sparingly used at Saint Agnes', and then only on high festivals, when vases of crimson bloom are placed on each side of the altar and under the seven lamps on the ambulatory screen. Nothing less deep or gorgeous in color seems to make an impression amid the glow of gold and glass. At Benediction the ostensorium is exposed on a pedestal erected on the reredos in order to fulfil the rubrical requirement which does not permit it to be placed on top of the tabernacle. A double flight of steps behind the altar leads to this platform, whence the monstrance flashes like a sunburst above the yellow spears of candle light and the red flame of lamps.

The choir gallery and organ are best seen from in front of the altar. Built over the large vestibule and with no supports on this side except heavy brackets, the organ loft is not the least successful part of the church design. Architects will best appreciate how skillfully a gallery spacious enough to contain a large organ and places for a hundred singers in the desired circular formation has been achieved without shadowing the back pews or interfering with the unbroken line of the nave. Our impression is chiefly that the organ has some-



Nave and Choir Gallery from the Altar.



Another View of Nave and Gallery from Altar.

how been made into a frame of silver pipes, like delicate fluted pillars, for the vivid circle of the rose window. The rose looks from here like a great brooch set in a silver casket, or like one of those old-fashioned round nosegays edged with lace, a nosegay of fadeless flowers and adamantine embroidery. If you have the true instinct for color, which Ruskin says is as much a gift as an ear for music, the cadence struck from silver pipes and youthful voices during the Mass will make no more melody than the singing chorus of dusky crimsons and violet blues that the sun strikes from the rose.

Ruskin has also said something about pulpits, something to the effect that they never should be large or highly decorated, lest the magnificence of the rostrum distract from the message of the preacher. He would probably approve of the pulpit of Saint Agnes', which conforms admirably to his law that when the form is kept simple, much loveliness of color and costliness of work may be introduced. This is a law fulfilled by Romanesque decorative detail in general. It decorates with color and cameo carving as the Gothic decorates with form and sculptural ornament. Durandus makes the pulpit a symbol of the life of the perfect, which is here lifted up over the altar rail on the gospel side of the chancel, a squat Doric column supporting an octagonal ambo with sides of perforated marble bordered by simple carved mouldings. A panel of scarlet silk takes the place of the cushion formerly laid on the reading desk under the book of the gospels to denote the softness and sweetness of the commands of Christ. "My yoke is sweet and my burden light."

You come now to the shrine of Our Lady, corresponding exactly to the chapel of Saint Joseph in the opposite transept. The only difference is in the statue in the niche and in the mural decoration. It is very evident that this wall was painted with special love and fervor, and was made as dazzling and splendid as the artist could imagine it. A suggestion of mosaic or enamel work is obtained by the use of much raised gold, in winding scrolls and circles, against a Marian blue of sapphire-like lustre and loveliness. The Virgin is a softened Byzantine Madonna, holding out to the worship of the world a stiff little Christ Child in white swaddling clothes. Gold

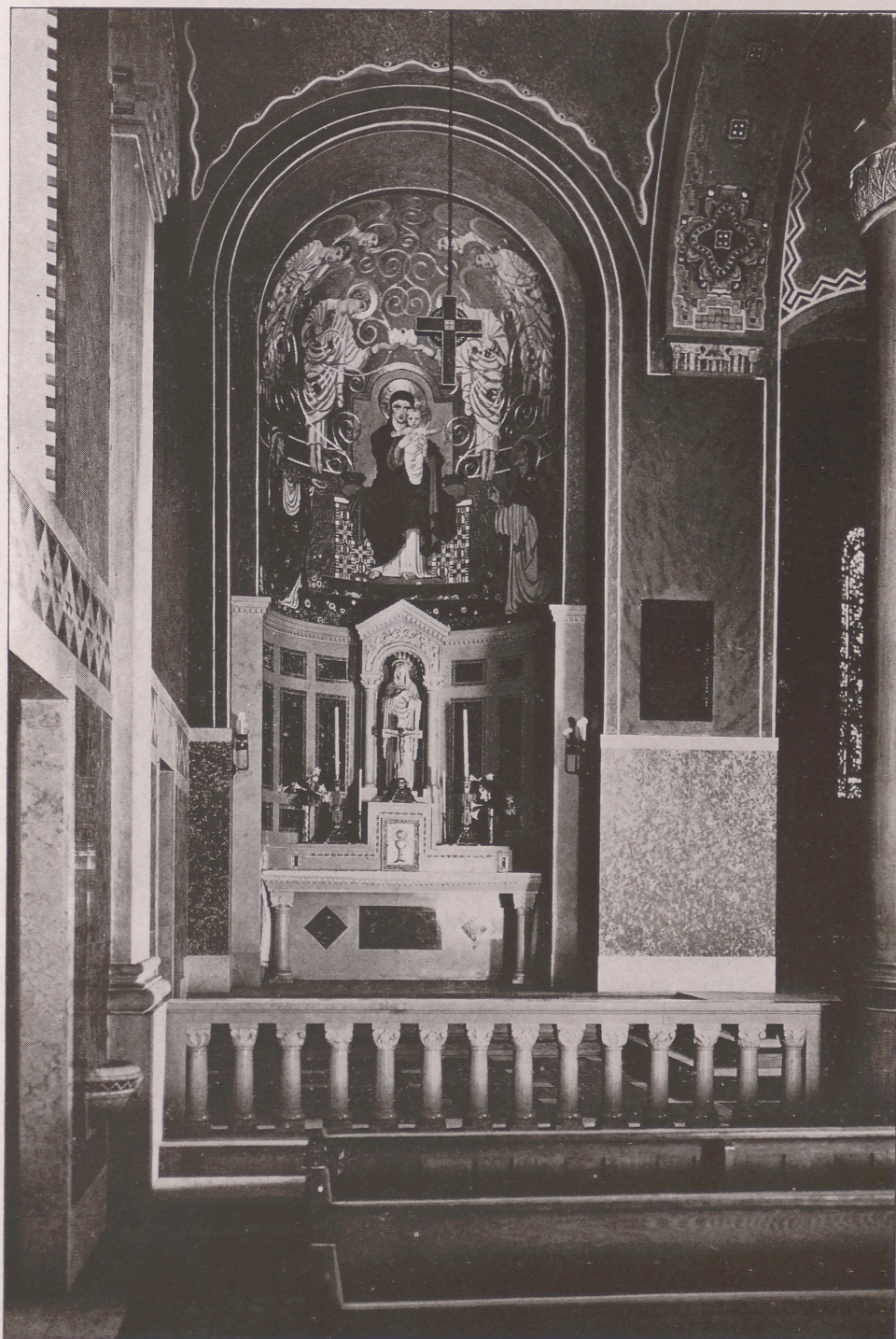
angels hover upon a blue-and-gold background bearing in their hands the crown denoting that Mary is the Queen of Heaven. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary kneels at one side of the throne, Saint Dominic at the other. The whole circling wall is like an aureole drawn with a brush dipped in gold around the noble and virginal head of the Madonna.

Down this aisle you will find three more confessionals. The first is inscribed: "Return to the Lord. He is bountiful to forgive"; the second, "The bruised reed He shall not break"; the third, "Be converted to Me and ye shall be saved."

In a recess is a shrine of the Sacred Heart, as simply and chastely conceived as an altar hewn in the rocky walls of the Catacombs. It consists of a plain mensa, or table, under a marble head of Christ carved in high relief upon a marble slab. Behind the head is a cross incrusting with mosaic and around it a golden nimbus with the inscription: *Cor Jesu Amor Flagrans* (Heart of Jesus burning with love). This head, the work of the artist of the *Pieta*, Mr. Henry Schmitt, is a composition of much dignity and reticence. It is happily free from the unauthorized and tasteless realism of many representations of the Sacred Heart, and at the same time makes its strong and gentle appeal to the devotion which has always been one of the mainsprings of the dynamic spiritual life of Saint Agnes Parish.

On your way back to this shrine, pause for a moment at the corner of the transept, at the outer wall, and take a diagonal view of transept, nave and chancel. It is the view an artist might take if he were going to paint a picture of the interior. It has a certain crowded and palpable splendor of arch piled upon arch and color splashed upon color. Pulpit and pillar, altar and angel, arcade and canopy, light dappled with shadow, all mingle and mount in a serried picturesqueness almost orchestral, like one of those smashing crescendos achieved when all the instruments and elements of music rush together in a final harmony.

This is one memorable vista. The church is full of others which you will discover for yourself if you go in search of them. There are churches which may be taken in whole at a glance. In them the first view is the best. There are others which are new with each visit,



Altar of the Blessed Virgin.




Pieta and Shrine of the Sacred Heart.

which have a hundred shy and hidden charms besides their obvious attraction for the casual eye, which are always revealing unexpected beauties, like the undiscovered depths and facets in the mind of a friend, to make familiarity breed content. This is the secret of the inexhaustible enchantment of the great masterpieces of the past. They never tire us, because they grow in beauty as the observer grows in knowledge and perception. In its humbler way, the Church of Saint Agnes has the same appeal. It reveals itself slowly, and has in it enough elements of the beauty of all time to help you, as few new churches can, to feel the inspiration that has created Christian art since the world was young.

V

THE PAINTED WALLS

O study the painter's part in the beautification of the church, choose a day when the light is good and the place is empty, take a seat about half way down the middle aisle and give yourself up to a general impression. It is always a good plan to get the whole view first and examine the details later. You will see nothing for a while but the great, challenging, audacious decoration of the half dome. You may find it rather bewildering and overpowering. The Director of the Cleveland School of Art, Mr. Henry Turner Bailey, said in a recent lecture that at first sight the figures on the apse of Saint Agnes' struck him as strange and a little startling, but as he sat in the quiet of the nave and surrendered himself to the atmosphere of the church, he had a sense of being lifted up to the blue of some celestial ether, a heaven in which the unfamiliar angels and the astonishing Christ were at home. Then it occurred to him that it might be more surprising if the radiant spirits of that world looked anything like the inhabitants of this.

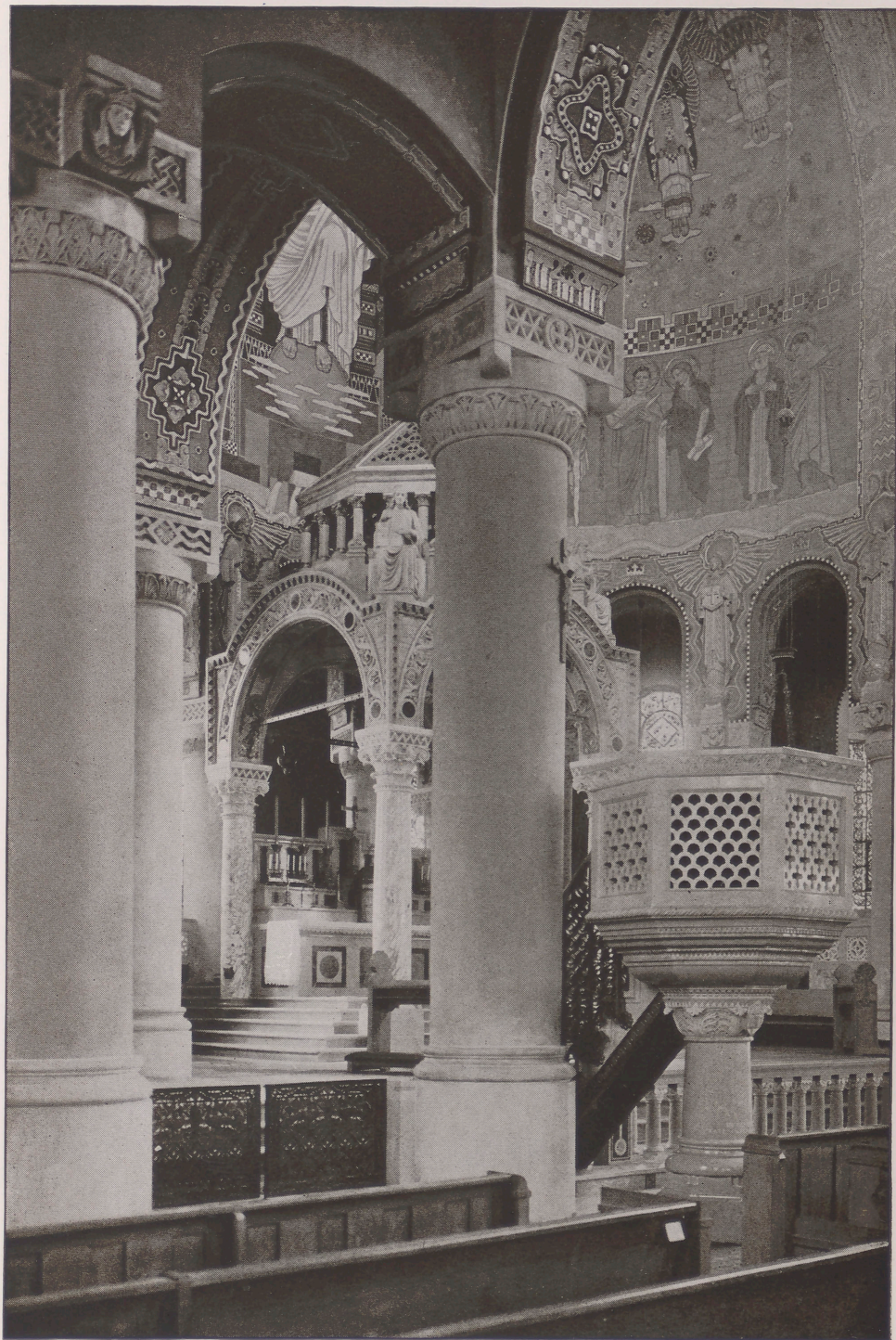
That is the explanation of the lasting influence of Byzantine decoration. It appeals to the imagination because it is never pictorial. Its great decorative figures are not portraits but symbols. They are not real and have therefore some chance of suggesting the ideal.

To the extent that it is decorative and not naturalistic, this wall painting is Byzantine, which is to say that it is of the Eastern tradition that the Romanesque builders followed in the interiors of their churches because the large plain spaces had to be rendered interesting by surface ornament. The Gothic gets color from its windows and embellishment from architectural detail. The Romanesque attains both with fresco and mosaic. Saint Agnes' has much more glass than the old churches of its type. It achieves an effect of unusual color because it adds to the Gothic richness of decorated windows the Romanesque or Byzantine warmth of decorated walls.

The great Byzantine half domes were in mosaic; they were more classical and conventional than this; but they had the same dominant central figure of the same majestic size, the same exuberance of color, the same purpose of inscribing roofs and walls with vast symbols of sublime truth. Look here and you will see all the elemental facts of Christian doctrine, set forth with daring imagination and a fearless employment of color and decorative form. The artist, Mr. Felix Lieftuchter, is a young Cincinnati man who seized his first great chance at a "ten-leagued canvas" to produce the largest and most ambitious apse decoration so far attempted in this country.

He has taken the firmament for a background and set it with stars and planets, he has drawn the signs of the zodiac in the great circle of Eternity, and against this panoramic splendor he has painted the Trinity. He has told the story of Creation in the angels of the Seven Days; of the Redemption in the great cross behind the throne of Christ; of sanctifying grace in the rivers of living water; of the commission of the Church in the frieze of the Apostles, sent to teach; of the chain of prayer between heaven and earth in the kneeling figures of the Virgin and Saint Agnes. There is vigor and exaltation in conception and composition — the high adventurousness of the human imagination scaling the heights of heaven to seek symbols transcendent enough to express the inexpressible.

The decoration of the body of the church is by a different hand and in a different manner from the painting of the apse. One is tied to the other only by a common sweep of fancy and flow of line. The effect of both together is of a stream circling the walls, a surge of color washing against the gray and solid bank of stone column and round arch. The four rivers that rise in the central Godhead pass through the Apostles and down the nave like a tide. There is a suggestion of waves in the rippling lines and curving vaults and in the undulant wings of the painted angels over the pillars, a constant ebb and flow that has source and sea in the supreme figure of the Redeemer holding in His Hand the Book of Life which proclaims Him the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. In the eyes of that Master of the tides are all the passion and pity, the majesty



Vista of Altar from East Transept.

and meekness, the divinity and humanity, implied in the incarnation of God for the salvation of man. The artist studied most of the existing literature about Christ before painting this extraordinary head and he believes that it expresses the general idea of the face of the Savior held by all the ancient writers.

In describing his work, Mr. Lieftuchter says that while it is impossible in such an undertaking to shake off the influence and inspiration of the incomparable mosaics of Rome and Byzantium, he endeavored to find a medium of expression in sympathy with modern feeling while preserving the formal dignity and simplicity of the old patterns. His figures are not imitations. They bear only the most general resemblance to the mosaic decorations of the past. His angels, both in form and color, suggest the work of the modern Russians, but since that represents a return to their own primitive traditions, certainly Greek in origin, it should not be out of harmony in a Byzantine composition. The artist thus explains the symbolic meaning of his painting:

"The monumental figure of Christ in majesty seated on the throne, ancient symbol of power, surrounded by a cluster of cherubim holding the seven lights of the apocalypse, forms the central and dominating feature of the composition and takes the central place between the twelve apostles in the frieze below representing mankind, and the figure of the Eternal Father on the vault of the apse, thereby symbolizing His position as mediator between God and man.

"Between the figures of God the Father and God the Son is the Dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, surrounded by seven golden flames, symbolic of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, forming together the traditional representation of the Holy Trinity.

"The figure of the Eternal Father is represented with arms outstretched in a bestowing attitude as Father of the universe. He is surrounded by a large circle symbolic of Eternity, which is formed by the signs of the Zodiac on a background of deep blue studded with stars and planets.

"Kneeling on the base of the throne at the feet of our Lord are the figures of the Virgin Mary and Saint Agnes in attitudes of suppli-

cation, representing the saints of the Church as intercessors for mankind at the throne of God. On either side of the central figure is a row of richly clad angels holding in outstretched arms symbols of the seven days of creation. The upward and outward movement of these figures following the large circle surrounding the figure of Jehovah and the oval aureola formed by the wings of the cherubim back of the figure of our Lord, formed the main rhythmic features upon which I chiefly depended to give something of the feeling of solemn dignity and grandeur, which the architectural space as well as the theme requires.

"The four rivers of living waters flowing from the base of the throne representing the graces of the Church and the large cross back of the central figure are further symbolic details.

"The inscription on the base of the throne: *Ecce Agnus Dei Qui Tollit Peccata Mundi*—Behold the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world—points to the fundamental idea of the composition, the redemption of mankind through Christ."

You will have to make a jump of several centuries to go from the figures of the apse to the decorations of the body of the church. They have in common, as has been suggested, a certain rhythm of design, a conventionalism that keys them to each other and to the architecture, and a strong insistence upon color. But in the nave decoration the colors are differently blended, after a more modern formula, and the design is neither classical nor medieval, but of a new school that has been making original and successful decorative experiments in Northern Europe, particularly in Norway and Sweden. Whether this blend of the traditional and the modern, of Byzantine and Scandinavian, with a hint of early Celtic for flavor, is congruous in a church interior of a true basilica type like that of Saint Agnes, let the purists and art critics decide. The scheme is at least original, and it is enough for us to see that it is well executed, that it is ecclesiastical in character and that the mingling of North and South, East and West, is in itself a proof of the Catholicity of a church in which all periods and forms of art seem to be at home.

You will notice that painted angels in the nave follow the sculptured angels in the chancel, and are quite as conventional in form and color. They are twelve in all, the mystic number indicative of the universal Church. Six bear shields inscribed with the names of virtues; to the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude, are added the distinctively Christ-like qualities of Patience and Charity.

The plain blue and gold of the ceiling of nave and aisles helps the procession of angels to bind the body of the church to the apse. The hoops of the barrel vault are very interesting; you may read there, if you will, a whole litany of saints, those preachers and doers of the word that are symbolized by the vaulting as bearing the dead weight of man's infirmity heavenward. Surely there can be no lack of inspiration for the decorator who reads the symbolists and learns that the very walls have meanings; that the roof signifies the charity that covers a multitude of sins, that the pavement is the foundation of faith, or humility, the four walls the four cardinal virtues, the windows the Sacred Scriptures, the stones the souls of the faithful.

The decorator here has made use of many symbols, and has revived to express them an old and long-lost medium. This is the medieval method known as *Al Secco*, which differs from *al fresco* in that the colors are applied to dry mortar but are themselves mixed with lime and water, making the painting an integral part of the plaster wall. The advantage of this method is to preserve the beautiful texture of the mortar and the sweeping trowel marks of the mason, giving life, warmth and durability to walls and vaults. Mr. Harold Rambusch, of New York, who directed the decoration, in an article in the *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* (Vol. III), says that this method of painting with lime is so enduring that walls recently uncovered in old churches which had been whitewashed at the time of the Reformation were found to be as brilliant and clear in color as when they were painted. He adduces the example of the Cathedral of Roskilde, the ancient capital of Denmark.

"There is a radiance and texture in these lime decorations that cannot be rivaled by anything executed in oil," declares Mr. Ram-

busch. "One of the most important decorative factors is that this technique produces no sheen, and the surfaces thus treated can be seen from any angle and from no position do they become indistinct because of the reflection of light."

When gold is used it is applied to the raised surfaces of the plaster, giving a very rich effect of incrustation to the spans of the arches. The side walls are quite plain, harmonizing with the stone and the marble wainscoting. Their decorative value is that of background and contrast; they are the wide margins of the missal in which are written the sermons that "reach the heart through the eyes instead of entering at the ears."

VI THE WINDOWS



SO far we have considered the windows only as the source of light, a light like the glow of a clear and mellow twilight, made up of many colors but not at once calling attention to the glass that transmits it. That is as it should be. For if there is one fact about stained glass more fundamental than any other it is that it is a part of the wall and not a picture hung upon it. However, competent authorities differ about other architectural details and principles of decorations, they are all agreed that the so-called "picture window" is an abomination, violating the first rule of the glass maker's art, which is to make a window and not a painting.

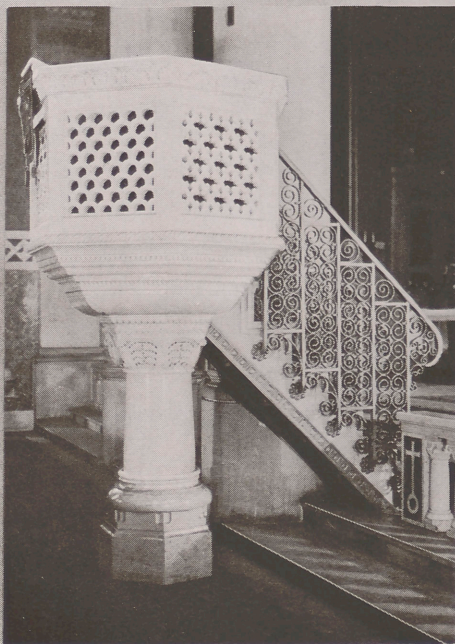
This transparent portion of the wall must be treated, therefore, as a flat surface, in a manner purely decorative and subordinated to the architecture. It should be pictorial only in the sense that a rug may be pictorial. It should have no perspective, because perspective in a window naturally draws the eye out of the church and is thus neither sound art nor sound doctrine. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century glassworker, peerless master of the inimitable art of Chartres and LeMans, "would sooner have worn a landscape on his back," says Henry Adams, "than have costumed his church with it; he would as soon have decorated his floor with painted holes as his walls."

One would need to read a good many volumes on decorated glass to make an intelligent study of any windows in which an attempt is made to revive the lost art of the glazier of the Middle Ages. He had an instinctive feeling for design and a whole forgotten science of color. He knew, for instance, according to Viollet-le-Duc, the eminent French architect, that blue is the light in windows, and he commanded all colors superbly because he knew how to manage blue. It is endlessly fascinating to watch how those unknown craftsmen handled their color; how skilfully they used lead as well as glass to make the setting as beautiful as the jewels; how exquisitely they

designed their medallions in a miraculous embroidery of parable and symbol and suggestion until the glass in medieval churches became in truth, as Mr. Cram says, "their flame of life," the final and inspired word of a great art and a great devotion.

The windows before you are not the windows of Chartres, or LeMans, or St. Denis, or Gloucester; but if you will look long enough at the glass in the chancel and the rose, keeping in mind always that the function of the window is to embellish the architecture, you will learn better than by many books what good glass is. You will travel a long way to find anything more beautiful than the color in those chancel windows as it sparkles and burns around the sanctuary. There is no color in the world, anyway, to compare with the magical color of jewelled glass. Every other medium is lifeless beside it. Pick out the blues here. Note how limpid and strong they are and how well combined with the other colors. See the vigor and depth of the reds, the clear fire of the greens, the brilliance of the amethysts and ambers. Observe that the strips of lead that hold the mosaic composition together form part of the design, and give accent and strength to the flooding color.

Here are medallion windows of the approved medieval type. The little panels, set in a wide ornamental border, depict scenes from the life of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin or a saint, the medallions in each window being tied together by the subject and by the color key. In the chancel the window behind the altar is the Crucifixion, and the two outer ones in the circle of seven honor Saint Peter and Saint Paul, a grouping which rests on a very early tradition. The rose window at the end of the nave has no figures at all. It is just a beautiful symbolic decoration set like a sunburst or breast-pin of jewels over the door of the church. In all of these windows the glass is of singular loveliness. Any student will recognize them as among the few modern examples of the best tradition of a great decorative art. That it is also a great religious art is borne in upon even the most ignorant as he kneels in the light of these windows and feels their vivid inspiration to worship and to praise.



Sanctuary Windows, Pulpit and Organ.

To study them in detail is an interesting and profitable exercise. They are in truth scriptures and lives of the saints, each an illuminated page in an endless volume of spiritual suggestion. You will notice that all of the chancel windows really tell the same story as the painting above the altar, the story of the Redemption and the life and mission of Christ on earth. They are a kind of compendium of the New Testament. The first, starting from the left, is devoted to Saint Peter, but Saint Peter only as the disciple chosen to head the Church Our Lord came to found. The bottom medallion shows him swearing fidelity to his Master; the second his repentance when he had broken that vow; the third the charge to Saint Peter, and the fourth Saint Peter guarding the gates of heaven.

The second is Our Lady's window. The centre panel depicts her enthroned in heaven, but the bottom and top medallions illustrate the Annunciation and the Nativity, so you see that Mary's window is mainly concerned with the life of Christ, as the next epitomizes His public ministry. It begins with the Baptism of Our Lord in the bottom medallion, shows Him calling the Disciples in the second, raising the daughter of Jairus in the third, and ends with the Sermon on the Mount.

In general the windows have four medallions in the centre surrounded by formal borders of a rich decorative design. Two of the chancel windows add interest and variety, however, by having only three medallions, slightly larger than the rest, and in the middle the most conspicuous window in the church is so arranged that a large panel of the Crucifixion fills the central space between the top of the reredos and the arch of the baldacchino. Below the Crucifixion, which thus forms the appropriate background for the altar, is a medallion portraying the Agony in the Garden and a small panel showing Christ before Pilate. A Pieta group fills the top medallion.

The two windows following illustrate the Glory of the Savior and His continuing mission as the Divine Mediator for men. In the first, the medallions, from bottom to top, represent the Resurrection, the Appearance first to Mary Magdalen in the garden and then to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the Ascension. The second

shows Our Lord the Consoler, below, Our Lord Enthroned in the centre, and above, Our Lord the Intercessor.

The last window in the chancel presents the story of Saint Paul, beginning with his conversion on the road to Damascus in the bottom panel. In the second he is appearing before Felix, in the third he is seen among the Athenians, and in the fourth he is writing his Epistles.

The windows in the body of the church, while following the same general design of four medallions in an ornamental border and conforming to the same correct principles of glassmaking, are not so rich in texture or so satisfying in quality as the apse windows. They have been made lighter, for one thing. It is evident, from the use of simple cathedral or stippled glass in the clerestory windows above, which softens the glare without coloring the light, that the desire to secure an adequately illuminated church has resulted in the sacrifice of some depth of tone in the glass of the nave.

Each of these sixteen windows tells the life story of a saint. Begin at the window next to the Lady Chapel on the east side of the church and you will find the heavenly roll of honor unfolding in the following order. Here the medallions are to be read from the top downward:

No. 1. St. Rose of Lima.

1. Confirmation of St. Rose.
2. St. Rose renounces the vanities of the world.
3. St. Rose accepts the white and black Butterfly as an inspiration to join the Order of St. Dominic.
4. St. Rose doing needlework for her livelihood and the support of the household.

No. 2. St. Agnes.

1. Rejects the life of the Roman noble.
2. St. Agnes protected by the angel.
3. Beheading of St. Agnes.
4. St. Agnes appears in glory to her parents.

No. 3. St. Catherine of Alexandria.

1. Teaching the Doctors.
2. Refusing to sacrifice to the pagan gods.
3. Martyrdom of St. Catherine.
4. Received into Heaven.

- No. 4. St. Francis of Assisi.
1. The Glorification of St. Francis.
 2. St. Francis chanting the Gospel at the first Christmas Mass.
 3. St. Francis before Pope Innocent III, who takes the Brotherhood under his protection.
 4. St. Francis renouncing a life of riches to enter the service of Christ.
- No. 5. St. Augustine.
1. St. Augustine and his mother, St. Monica.
 2. Converted by St. Ambrose.
 3. St. Augustine and the child at the seashore.
 4. St. Augustine in his study.
- No. 6. St. Patrick.
1. St. Patrick driving the snakes from Ireland.
 2. Baptizing the King's daughter at the well of Cruachan.
 3. Founding the See of Armagh.
 4. Preaching before the king Leoghaire.
- No. 7. St. Teresa.
1. Entering the Carmelite noviate.
 2. Writing the "Relations".
 3. Founding the Convent of St. Joseph of Avila.
 4. Death of St. Teresa.
- No. 8. St. Thomas of Aquin.
1. The parents of St. Thomas take him to Monte Cassino and place him under the care of the monks.
 2. St. Thomas converts his sisters.
 3. St. Thomas consulted by King Louis.
 4. St. Thomas writes the "Summa."
- No. 9. St. Vincent de Paul.
1. Opens the retreat of Saint Lazare.
 2. Bids the ladies of charity to care for the foundlings.
 3. Takes the place of a galley slave at Marseilles.
 4. Organizes relief for the poor.
- No. 10. St. Bernard of Clairvaux.
1. Sees a vision of his mother, who persuades him to become a monk.
 2. Exhorting his people to join the crusade.
 3. Denouncing the heresies of Abelard.
 4. The Blessed Virgin Mary appearing to St. Bernard.

No. 11. St. Boniface.

1. Fells the sacred oak at Geismar.
2. Preaches to the pagans.
3. Archbishop of Mainz.
4. Baptizes the King.

No. 12. St. Benedict.

1. Instructing his two disciples.
2. Blessing a departing missionary.
3. Last interview with his sister, St. Scholastica.
4. His departure for Rome.

No. 13. St. Dominic.

1. St. Dominic worshipping at the foot of the Cross.
2. The miracle of the meals served by Angels.
3. The Blessed Virgin instructing St. Dominic in the use of the Rosary.
4. St. Dominic appearing before the Pope for the approval of his Order.

No. 14. St. Lawrence.

1. Receiving the treasures of the Church.
2. Giving alms.
3. Before the Emperor Decius.
4. Martyrdom.

No. 15. St. Aloysius.

1. Receiving his first Communion from St. Charles Borromeo.
2. Resolves to resign his title and family honors to his brother.
3. Instructed in the catechism by his mother.
4. St. Aloysius asking alms.

No. 16. St. Stephen.

1. St. Stephen's speech before the Council.
2. Ordination of St. Stephen.
3. Stoned to death.
4. Burial.

VII

THE FINAL SYMBOL



THESE pages have been an attempt to translate into words the things that the Church of Saint Agnes has to say in its architecture, its decoration and its symbolism. They are a very free and incomplete translation, but they would be still more incomplete if they were concluded without re-emphasizing its symbolic expression of something parochial and of the present as well as of things universal and of the past.

Styles of architecture and of decoration are only symbols. The church is only a symbol, and this church would have no special interest if it spoke a dead language or memorialized a dead past. What makes interesting the old forms of faith and fervor employed by the architect is that they are the forms most fit to clothe and embody the soul of the congregation today.

Saint Agnes Parish was organized in 1893 by the present pastor, the Rev. Gilbert P. Jennings, LL.D. For more than a quarter of a century it has been shaped and fired by a high and uncompromising spiritual ideal. The generosity which has built and paid for the church, the school and a complete parochial plant has been inspired by the most exalted motives. In twenty-seven years there has never been a personal solicitation of contributors or a public record of contributions. The parishioners have been taught to give as the artists of the Middle Ages built—for the love of God. The devotional life of the parish is well organized and constantly stimulated. There are seven crowded Sunday Masses and nearly a hundred thousand yearly communions in the church. There is a punctilious care for ceremonial observance, a sustained regard for the solemn pageantry and poetry of Catholic worship. Sincerity, order, dignity and ardor are felt in the parish life as well as in the parish church. The heart of both is the Blessed Sacrament, made by perpetual preaching

the centre of the spiritual structure as it is the centre of the material edifice.

It is not by accident, indeed, that churches take form and grow. All good ecclesiastical architecture has its root in spiritual vitality, but spiritual vitality does not always, alas, express itself in good architecture. Saint Agnes Parish had the first requisite, the love of a devout people for the House of God, and it acquired the second, an architect with knowledge and training enough to interpret and symbolize that love. The combination is rare — so rare that the medievalist is almost justified in his lament that all religious art, Catholic as well as Protestant, died of the Reformation. Church architects capable of distinguished work are few, and pastors and people who know enough to employ them and demand their best are still fewer. No wonder the discovery of an excellent piece of work tempts us to become panegyric, and compels us to go back to a richer past for measures of comparison.

The Middle Ages are alive today mainly because they built churches. "If they had reflected only what was practical," says one historian, "nothing would have survived for us." And they built churches because they were alive.

If a church like the Church of Saint Agnes tells us no more than that, if it only points the way to the springs of Christian art, if it only shows the need of architects schooled both in art and in faith, if it only helps others to build better by its shadowy suggestion of how lovely are the tabernacles of the Lord of Hosts, and how blessed are they who dwell in His House, it has said all it has to say.



The Reverend Gilbert P. Jennings, LL. D., Pastor of Saint Agnes Church.

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